HOWTH CASTLE



LITERARY MAGAZINE

HOWTH CASTLE

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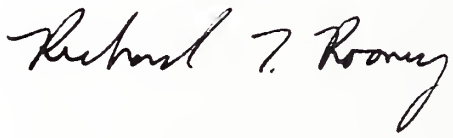
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Editor's Note

Upon these pages one finds things beyond just a collection of literature. Far more exists. Presented is a testament, a reflection of history, whose authors have penned the moral and social values that defined humanity during this period. Far be it from me to present a definition of the world, I merely gather and present; I leave the rest to you.



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Anne Digate

From one destination to the next, like
a flitting chariot across the night
skies, we are bent upon pleasure, star-
hopping faster than boredom in pursuit,
but only fast enough to stay one star
ahead — just one star ahead — as we
force ourselves on despite the
anticipation of disillusionment.
We never let up, we never let go, because
the light up ahead outshines the dimness
just behind.

— *James Assatly*

Man in a Situation

James Assatly

There is a man on a platform. It is a very small platform, square, not much bigger than a large coffee-table. This platform is about thirty-five feet above ground, held aloft by one pillar about as thick as a telephone pole. The man sits on this platform dressed only in blue-jeans, with no shirt or shoes. The platform is out-of-doors, in the center of the main square of the town. It could be any town. The temperature is about sixty-five degrees, the sun is shining, with an occasional puffy cloud casting shade as it passes by. The air is dry, probably crisp at night, and so it must, after all, be a northern town.

This man does not appear to be happy up there on the platform. He appears listless, with his hands lain sullenly on his outstretched legs. His feet dangle over the side of the platform, and occasionally he straightens his back for a moment, but then he quickly falls back into a slumping posture.

Below him, on the ground, there is a crowd standing about. Most of those in the crowd are looking-up at him. Some talk to each other in low tones, nodding in agreement to some shared assumption, glancing up at the man on the platform, nodding to each other again.

Several of the members of the crowd stand with their backs completely turned upon the scene. They stand together, somewhat distanced from the larger mass of people, with their arms folded, contemptuous expressions sneered across their faces.

The man has no way of getting down from the platform. He must find a way to get down, of course, but his options are extremely limited. There is no ladder. When he looks down at the crowd he feels that, while it is not generally hostile to him, there is also little sympathy for him. These people are mildly interested to see how he will handle the situation, but they see it as primarily his own problem. After all, the consensus went, he had got himself up there in the first place. It was his problem to get himself down.

He is perplexed but, though forlorn, he is not defeated. As the day passes he even begins to find some humor in his situation. He knew it was ridiculous.

The small group that had stood with its back to him had grown, and now faced him. It was clear to him that they were involved in his dilemma only to the extent that they were sure he was incapable of solving his problem and wanted to witness his failure. They were obviously going to take pleasure in this failure, and would trumpet it to the world as clear evidence of his incompetence. He felt sure of this.

He doesn't enjoy the idea of being held up as an example of ignorance or incompetence. The presence of this malicious element in the crowd worries him. He is beginning to think harder about what he can do to get himself out of the situation.

He has considered the possibility of jumping into the arms of the crowd, using their bodies like a fireman's net. But, to do so without having first asked for their permission could invite charges of usury. It could also lead to serious injury if the crowd should choose to move away from the platform as he jumped, thus allowing him to fall, unaided to the ground. This would be extremely embarassing.

But to ask their permission would be an absolute admittance of defeat. He was incapable of handling his own problems, they'd say, and his detractors could then exult in his failure. It seemed also, according to his own beliefs, to be the ultimate in humilation to ask for the aid of people whom one knew to be, at best, only indifferent to oneself.

As the afternoon passes on, it has become apparent that he must soon make a decision. Growing chillier with the setting sun, he has felt a consternation begin to crawl into his thoughts. He must act now if the ability to do so were not to be frozen by his consternation. This was it.

Wrapping his bare arms around his chest to warm and brace himself, he shouted out to the crowd.

"Hey, crowd!" he said. "I know you don't

care about me, and that you're only hanging around to see what's going to happen, but let's face it; you all share in this little predicament I'm in. You participate with me, no matter how little you care. Your presence helps to make at least half of this situation. Together we make up the whole thing here, and without me you'd be an audience without a focus. If not for me, to whom would you direct your apathetic stares?"

With this speech some of the people in the crowd began moving immediately away from the platform. That they should hear and comprehend the man's words was, in their opinion, already too much to ask. Others listened, but with an indifferent interest, as if they were simply too comfortable standing where they were to leave, and so gave half an ear to what he said. Still others began conferring together once again in low tones, nodding once again in agreement as they stole glances up at the stranded man.

It was true, one woman was heard to say, the crowd did indeed use the man above as the focus for their apathetic energy. They did, to some extent, owe him something -- though in an instant, most members of the crowd concluded privately that the value of what they owed him was not so great.

"What is it that you want?" shouted the woman who had just spoken. She had never raised her voice in a crowd before and she was nervous. Her voice shook as she felt the eyes of the crowd shift from the man on the platform to herself. She could feel her neck itch with a sudden sweat at the hairline.

There was complete silence.

After an interval of several long seconds the man on the platform swallowed and then shouted out.

"Catch me!"

There was an audible gasp from the crowd as a murmur rolled through its members like a wave. They began milling about, slowly at first, and then with growing agitation. Some had taken angry righteous looks upon their faces. Others simply wore faces of disbelief, or confusion.

The spokeswoman for the crowd, a position she now wholeheartedly regretted, answered with a voice both dismayed and incredulous.

"But we don't even know you!".

The crowd was becoming restless. Faces were visibly reddened, teeth were clenched and unclenched, fists were tightened and loosened, and then tightened again. The crowd found itself confronting the realization that they were to be forced into an involvement with a man they didn't know, and perhaps wouldn't even like. It was shocking.

He yelled it again.

"Catch me!"

Now he stood tall, holding himself erect at the edge of the platform, looking as if he were preparing to dive. His hair, neck-length and brown, was caught in the breeze of the setting sun, and his body, outlined in silhouette against the fiery colors of the waning light, was suddenly very beautiful. The crowd saw this. He was the perfect image of a man at that moment. The crowd was at last won over to his cause. His beauty proved to be the conclusive agent of his victory.

Now that he had made an impression he realized that he had the crowd moving and thinking. His sense of humor came back to him, helping to push aside any humiliation he may have felt earlier. He realized that he was enjoying himself. The crowd was stimulated, he was the cause, and he intended to make the pleasure he was feeling last. More words came to him.

"I'm just like you!" he shouted down, a hint of glee in his voice.

It was undoubtedly his crowd now. There he stood, above them, and there they stood, below him, frozen in amazement. From the back of the crowd came a barely audible groan. It was one of his unshaken detractors. He heard the groan for what it was a recognition of his victory over the situation.

Speaking clearly, in a composed tone of authority, each word placed evenly, assuredly after the next, he said:

"Any one of you might have found yourself up here, like me, alone. If I had jumped and died, it might have been any one of you."

He was no longer shouting, it wasn't necessary. The crowd stood in dead silence, looking up at him.

He was grinning now, mocking them with his eyes. They were completely involved in his situation, whether they wanted to be or not. Each member of the crowd was forced to consider for themselves feelings they might have experienced had it been they who were up there on the platform.

Now the crowd knew what had to be done. Acting spontaneously, in unison, they shouted "Jump!" Simultaneously, they rushed in together to one side of the platform base, extending their collective arms into a human net, ready for the man on the platform.

To their amazement, he flipped himself backward, away from the crowd, off the other side of the platform. He fell unaided to the ground, landing squarely on his head, smashing it to pieces. His neck and spine were snapped in many places. His body lay lifeless, ridiculously contorted in a puddle of blood.

Wails rose up from the crowd, along with shreiks of horror and moans. Most of the crowd was stunned beyond action, some fainted, some vomited.

The reluctant spokeswoman had, however, kept her head. She raced over to the body and covered it with her overcoat.

As the minutes passed, the crowd began to regain its composure. Members of the crowd began once again to talk amongst themselves. Some even grinned a little sheepishly, surprised at their own emotional reactions, perhaps even a little pleased. Laughter began to be heard, as well as an angry word here or there.

"Imagine that?" someone said, a note of irritation in her voice.

"Yeah," a man replied, "the nerve of that guy."

"Really" said another, "can you believe it? What an asshole."

The crowd began at last to disperse. As the people began to walk away, more laughter was heard; a few tentative jokes. The body was left to itself. After just a few more minutes the crowd had completely evaporated, leaving only the dubious spokeswoman. She walked back to the body, lifted up her overcoat and searched the man's jeans for some ID. Her face was contorted with obvious distaste, and she scrupulously avoided contact with any blood or skin. She found a number and wrote it down. Some body would have to replace the overcoat. She walked away to find a phone booth, not pausing to give the body a second glance.



Liniment and Sympathies

Two years
I've worn your knife
carved so eloquent
so ladylike
through my chest
Worn two years
as badge, as epitaph
and evidence against you
Twisted clockwise
when the pain numbed
And back again
when that grew tolerable
But after two years
friends and passersby
no longer pause
to offer liniment and sympathies
Instead, they hurry by
laughing amongst themselves
at my own fingerprints
worn deep into the handle.

- *Gerry J. Waggett*

When Doria pours coffee, she straightens
her back and closes her eyes softly.
She knows exactly how long it will take
the cup to fill.

The dream begins: A distant bell sounds
across the sun-risen moor. The call
of wind through wood caresses her body,
her lips. Here, upon some gently bending
reeds, she'll lay her weariness, lost
to the world behind her.

Coffee reaches brim of cup, the filling is
complete. With the supple skill
of an ancient and expert craftsman,
she lifts her wrist in unseen movement,
stemming the flow of the black liquid.
Off and away she carries herself to
the next table.

- *James Assatly*

A Nightmare That Won't Stop

I wake to your speaking, "See?
See what I mean?" But it isn't
You, really; just a bridge
From a dream

Two hours before
The alarm's due to scream,
I see the past in the clock; touching
You through other ones and sevens,
three to elevens and all in between,
And I want to have...you don't want me.
I stroke my own waist, and still feel
Your hand, it's me that you're asking
It's me...you don't want.

In the dark, I can't see a thing
But the glowing clock. Am I blinded
From blackness? Or too full of the
Past which spills down my face
Scratching salt lashes
That feel like a whip as they splash
To the sheets, releasing the smell
Of two bodies moving, but even that
You don't want

Any more than I want
To see that face
Too full of numbers blurring,
It stalls and then passes each mark
Ticks in my ear that you...
Don't...want...me...

I clutch and pluck and the skin
Of my waist, as though I could take
The parts of me you don't want
And throw them away, or rip out
A hole where my wanting could drain.

- Nikki Michellé

Her Morning After Their Wedding Night

Gazing through the steam
rising from her coffee,
she rests her head
on the kitchen table
and recalls kindergarten workbench
painted yellow red and blue —

With one plastic hammer blow
the boy fit the rectangle
into the circle, cracking
the workbench. While he sleeps
she sips coffee
so hot it burns her lips.

— Christopher Jackson

The Constant Foe

Beth Pratt

The frail, elderly woman lay on the bed in excruciating pain. Her eyes were clamped tightly shut. Her hands, along with her legs and arms, were horribly contracted; never again would these limbs straighten. She was in constant pain, in constant agony. Her arms shook endlessly, until she felt like a knife was tearing through them, piercing the muscles. If only the shaking would stop, if only her arms would lay still, perhaps the pain might then subside. She tried to move and straighten her arms, that sometimes helped, but she found the useless muscles would not respond. She could not even move her arms enough to pull the cord that would summon the nurse. What had once been a simple task, pulling a cord a few inches away from her hand, was now an impossibility. She hoped the nurse would be in to check her later; perhaps she would bring her a pill and reposition her aching arms.

After some time the nurse came and gave her some medication. Painkillers rarely did any good; what the nurse gave the elderly woman was something to help her sleep. The nurse washed the woman's body and brushed the lifeless hair that lay against her scalp. How long and beautiful it had once been! When she had become unable to tend to her long hair herself, the staff at the hospital had cut it off.

Her husband had loved to run his hands through the silky thickness of her long, flowing hair. He had once told her it was the hair he had imagined the woman to possess in the story the 'Gift of the Magi'. And he would laugh and joke that he did not have an expensive gold watch to sell. A tear trickled down her face as she thought of her dear husband. How kind and loving to her he had been. She was glad he had not lived to witness her condition, lived to see her turned into a helpless, bedridden patient. He probably would have hated to have seen her this way. She was always so independent, hating it when people waited on her. Now she couldn't even move her arms without help. Why, she thought, why have I become what I am? Finally she drifted into sleep and for awhile left her crippled body. She dreamed.

In her dream she was young, a teenager, running through the back fields of her childhood home. She had lived on a farm and she had loved to explore the green fields that were filled with adventures. She was running, the tall grass brushing her slender, strong legs. The bright sun shone on her brown skin and the wind blew through her long hair. She felt alive with the day, a beautiful spring day full of life. She stopped for a moment when she spotted her friend in the distance, galloping towards her on his horse. He rode to her and lifted her astride and they were off, running at top speed through the green fields. Her strong legs clung to the horse's sides and her arms encircled her friend's waist as they rode. It seemed that they rode on forever, the landscape a blur as they passed by. Suddenly, the horse jerked, and she fell off. When she tried to pick herself up off the smooth grass, she found her legs would not move. The grass became white linen sheets, and the beautiful spring day disappeared. It was only another grey day in the nursing home. But for a moment she had remembered what it had felt like to have strong legs carry her through the world.

The nurse came again that night to give her some more medication. By that time, the pain in her arms and legs had put her in terrible agony. It had seemed like forever since the last pill. In her bed, the only reality she knew was the pain, and it was a slow reality. The minutes stretched for an hour, an hour for a day. The only thing that kept her mind occupied was the pain, the constant, never ending pain. She tried to remember a time when the pain had not been with her and could not. The only time the pain relented was in her dreams and visions of

her other life, a life that it seemed she had lived a million years ago.

She dozed off again and began to remember that life. How she had loved her teenage years! She had been young and strong and full of romantic notions. She had some friends would sit at the malt shop and gossip about Stan Holt, the senior quarterback, who all the girls dreamed of dating. And it had been her that he had taken to the homecoming dance, for she had once been beautiful, with her long hair, her blue eyes, and her slim body.

They had danced all night. She remembered how her small hands had fit into his when they danced. They had danced until the very last song, and she had kept right up with him, her long legs swaying with the music. Her legs had been too tired from dancing that night. The next day they had gone to the lake. She had run through the sand and he had tried to catch her. They had relaxed in the cool, smooth water, under the hot sun. Her legs had kicked and her arms had stroked through the water gracefully. When she paddled through the water, she had felt so strong, like she could have swum all the way to the other side of the lake. For the rest of the day they had sunbathed and her skin had turned a golden brown. When Stan took her home that night, he had kissed her and asked her to wear his varsity sweater. She remembered how quickly she had run upstairs to see herself wearing it in the mirror and she remembered how magical his kiss had been.

They went out many times for the remainder of their senior year and even stayed in touch while he was at college. And her dreams did come true. She married her high school sweet heart and became Mrs. Stanley Holt. When they walked down the aisle, her legs were shaking because of her nervousness; when he looked down at her and smiled his warm smile, she had known things would be okay. The ceremony went fine. Her wedding night was the most frightening night of her life. She did not know what Stan would think of her. But he was kind and gentle and took everything slow. She remembered how close she had felt to him, how she loved his strong, muscular frame. She thought about how beautifully their bodies had matched and how wonderful it had been to be held in his protecting arms. She had loved to wake up in the morning surrounded by his loving arms. They had often taken long walks after breakfast, talking about what then had seemed important. She had taken those walks for granted, she thought now. When she had been a young woman, it was nothing to move her legs one step after another, as Stan held her hand in his. What she would give now to take just one more walk with her beloved, to feel her long legs move gracefully and hear Stan talk about the beautiful day. How long it had been since she had heard his voice.

On Thursday she had her bath. This was the day she longed for all week. For a short while, she left her hated bed and felt a little less confined. The nurse's aide would lift her out of her bed, put a clean johnny on her, and wheel her down to the bathroom. On those days she would pass the other patients who lived in the nursing home. Most of them were sitting in wheelchairs, but some of them were walking.

The envy and hatred she felt when she saw those walking was immeasurable, yet she had never been a jealous person. But it seemed so simple to them, to walk from their beds to the bathing room. For her it was an impossibility. Her legs were so contracted that just moving them resulted in bolts of pain. Sometimes she would see people knitting or reading, using their hands. Before she had become an invalid, she had loved to read. Turning each page and becoming more engrossed with very paragraph of the story was one of her greatest pleasures. Often while waiting for her husband to return from work, she would sit out on the porch and read. Her husband had shared her passion for reading and between the two of them they had accumulated hundreds of books. She wondered what had happened to their books, each one had been a treasured possession.

Warm water enveloped her as she was lowered into the bathtub. The water eased the pain some and made her feel clean and refreshed. Here was one activity that she had done in her other life. She wished that she could stretch out her arms and legs and lay back in the tub, but she could no more do that than she could walk. The warm water cleansed every pore in her body, soothing her tender

skin. For these few minutes she was somewhat released from her bonds. Her baths reminded her of when she and Stan would lay in the big bathtub in their house, with the radio playing classical music. They would just sit in the warm water and relax. As she lay in this small tub she remembered the beautiful violin concerto that Stan had loved. After some time had passed, the nurse returned and took her out and dried her off, then wheeled her back to her room. Her pleasure for the week was over. A woman who had once enjoyed making love, long walks and fast horseback rides, now only had a bath to look forward to once a week.

As usual, the bath comforted her enough to allow her to fall asleep. It was becoming increasingly harder for her to fall into a slumber, due to the pain, but the bath made a welcome sleep come easier. And in her sleep she dreamed and escaped into the past. A past where she could walk, where she could be free. A past where she had a husband, a home, and her independence. A past without pain. And she dreamed, and the dreaming made the reality almost bearable. So she dreamed.

Months had passed, and the pain had worsened to the point where even a bath did not soothe her. She was unaware of the passing of time, she was only aware of the pain. She wept, sometimes for hours, not being able to bear the constant pain. Even eating caused discomfort; she rarely ate when the aide came to feed her. Bones stuck out of her frame at every angle. Her face had an emaciated, sunken look. Even in her dreams the pain crept in, not letting her remember, not letting her escape reality. The medication, baths, nurses' care, all did nothing to help her escape the torment. The pain was a constant foe that never left her side. It could not be vanquished, nor would it surrender. For her, reality was constant pain. That was all that existed in her world.

One night she felt herself drifting again, drifting to sleep. But this time it seemed as though the pain did not accompany her into sleep. She dreamed of the fields behind her house. It was a beautiful day, and the wind rustled through the long grass. She began to walk, then turned and looked back. All she could see was a black, dark space. She walked on, marveling at how her legs were once again strong. She reached up to her head and felt that her long brown hair had returned. Up ahead, she saw the familiar figure of her husband. She began running using her strong legs to carry her toward the light and away from the blackness behind her.



Private Matters

Margaret Gilleran

The woman sighs and leans back against the bed pillows, glancing quickly at the nearly catatonic man beside her. The "act" had been completed and she is, temporarily, free. She looks down, appraising her body. The endless evaluation: decent breasts, flat stomach, smooth hips, thighs showing a little softness near the rear. The first signs of decay?

The body is her tool; if it all falls to ruin, so might her existence. Maintaining her allure is critical; competition is everywhere and she, like everything, is aging. If the value of her body decreases, she might not be able to sustain her current position. Position...she smiles in the stillness. Which position? Flat on her back? On her knees? Upside down? Or maybe a quick blowjob? I aim to please, she thinks, and they aim to pierce.

She breathes deeply, staring at the ceiling, remembering another time, a time when something different had actually seemed possible, but, in the end, proved too elusive to grasp. She sees herself in that distant, long ago, almost forgotten classroom and is amused at how incongruous she must have seemed to her classmates in her tight jeans and makeup. It was in that course, a Women's Studies course, that she had first read how women are socialized to have an overwhelming desire to please, to mollify, to be loved.

She could relate to that, but she couldn't relate to the women in her class. They were too angry, certainly different from any of her friends, and she sensed that, in some way, her classmates held her in contempt. The woman perceived an almost palpable hostility for her and her stereotypical femininity.

There had been a lot of discussions in that class, but she never said much. Her classmates constantly bounced various feminist theories and writers off each other and she felt outclassed. The woman understood her classmates, but she hadn't heard of most of the writers or theories and only had her own experiences to go by. That was more than enough anyway; a lifetime of mini-rapes, whistles from passing cars, catcalls from construction sites, had told her a great deal about the condition of women in society. She knew, depite the intellectual rhetoric, her assets: good tits and a great ass; she could make her own way. Those few college courses had been just an interim activity anyway.

The man beside her is asleep and she studies him critically in the dim light. Is this one like all the others? What pivotal events in his life brought him to this place, to this bed, to this body? What are his real concerns? Does he even have any beyond the typical male obsessions of money, sports, and the neverending business of getting laid? The woman looks quickly at the mirror above the bed and realizes she is able to recline on this bed and contemplate her circumstances. Anyway, I'm being too harsh, she muses, I don't know all men, so, I cannot pretend to know all men's motivations. Perhaps he cares for his children?

The woman stretches and sits up. Why cast blame for her own situation; she had made her own choices. Ironically, she remembers the old adage about making your bed and then having to lie in it. The double-entendre could not escape her and she worries, briefly, that she is becoming old, bitter, cynical. She certainly does "lie" in her bed, she thinks with a giggle. The woman swings her legs over the side, dangling her feet and looking again, over her shoulder, at the man beside her. Sex with a stranger has its advantages: one only has to share the body.

She walks to her dressing table, a whore's table filled with mysterious tubes and jars. Preservation is time consuming and expensive, but restoration is even more costly. Better to preserve, she thinks.

The woman looks in the mirror, yet another evaluation. She is still beautiful, although she had been more beautiful before she had begun her current line of work. A profession riddled with deception and artifice had worn her out, taken away her freshness.

She brushes her hair and again remembers the college courses and her decision to leave school

and take up with her present occupation. At the time, it had seemed right, but hindsight, she suppresses a laugh, always allows a clearer view. The man on the bed begins to snore and the woman feels repulsion.

Hastily, she pulls on her Chinese-style robe, belts it, and leaves the room. She walks past the childrens' bedroom, looks back once more at her sleeping husband, and starts down the stairs. It is time to make breakfast for her family.



seduction

the windows are steaming
the kettle
screaming
unattended
tongues lapping
shoes
lying by the door
the dog barks
unsure
and circles itself

- Christopher Benedetto



Elizabeth A.. Lennon

Moving

It all fits into a box
I hug to my breast blindly,
cheek to cardboard, angle to angle.
At the stairs, a tantrum
banging my legs, each step
a struggle between balance and bruises.
By the time I reach the top,
it is asleep, of course,
heavy with dreams unaware.
I set it down, awake and
unfold the moments before me:
finding things, losing people.

— *Sally DeAngelis*

The Miracle

Lady of dreams,
your gentle voice
awakens the senses,
Like a rain shower in spring
Its soothing embrace,
Warm
as a summer gust
which caresses and excites,
Entwined in a miracle
called love.

—*Mark David Vincent*

Sonnet 116

Thy shadow moving walls art worse than lights;
The gambling brook should take the last box call;
And shadows understand the last of Rites
That only art the shadows on the wall.
The water that was running, running from
The gambling brook, or running to the Night
Creating time or differential sum,
I spirit not the movement, be it right.
Discursive poesy, discordant shades
Of gray, and black, divine a sacred fear;
Phases of fear become the Night's parades;
Doth the clock tick, is that all I do hear?
Then rip the shadow from my face, and see
If I do care, that Thou are there, in me.

- *Stephen Michael Mellor*

Sounding

Of course there is the river but
the weeping willows bending
to brush the tips
of the long grass is what I see
and the gold of the grass and the trees
is everywhere moving
through and around the fine web,
the perfect net of grass
and willow strands.

I will lie there on the ground
as a piece of the land
not dancing through the grass
like these light sparrows
but resting weightless
with my cheek in the mud,
I will smear the black silk
on my face, feel the grass
touch my ankle and ear.

I will watch the gold move
as a mist through the willow grass
to the water where it is a wave pressing
on the wave of the river
pushing out to the harbor
where a whale
is swimming in the deep water.

I will lie in this place
with my ear fitting
into the mud, listening
to that whale.

- Darragh Murphy

Blue Heron

Whatever the rain has stirred
is rising to the surface

of the Muddy River:
a blue heron

pale blur poised
in the shadows

suddenly uncoils

its long neck and slender head
to strike, there, in the shallows

at the moon floating
free at last. It's dawn

for the fisher bird, and
now dawning on me:

nothing is ours,
not even the words

we may or may not
happen to catch.

- Keith Snyder

Sun Devil

The man behind the camera
captured
a late desert sun, a streak of wild cloud
and gave them a name.

If I had been there,
what would I have seen
gleam for an instant high overhead?
A comet in the winter sky,
scorching a trail on the skin of the night?
A shot of orange light
that leaves in its smoky pink path
a familiar ghost?
or a dervish
dancing madly
over Santa Fe?
With only one dance,
one moment to spin out your life,
you were caught—
not as a god or a feather
but as a devil in the setting sun.

- *Kathleen Vejvoda*

Preparing For Shabbat

Years ago a woman asked her husband
to go down to the store at the corner
where the three roads meet and traffic
is heavy with wagons bringing food
fresh from the farms. She asked him
to buy turnips and carrots bundled together

with string tied around their tops as green
as the trees on either side of the slow river
near where her mother still hangs the wash
on a line stretched between elms.

She asked him please to get a shank of lamb,
the chokeberry pie she ordered from the baker
special for the dinner with his folks.
She helped him into his coat, pushed the buttons
through the right holes, nudged him out the door.

She went back to her feather duster
but instead of working she sat down, leaned
against the wood paneled wall, looked out
the bay window, down the narrow street.

Buildings boarded up the sky but not
those days when she lay with her back
to the cool earth, open blue all around.
Through the afternoon she told herself
the tales her mother had passed down —
of wolves and sacrifice and wild nights and
days dancing, steady feet pounding the earth.

— *Edie Mueller*

The Wedding

In a crowded stand of fir I wait for you
my heart beating faster than the river
that runs from waterfall, stumbles over dead
trees, catches, like the cry
of the mica-veined rocks.
Chinese in mourning wear white.

I wear my grandmother's once-white
lace. Beneath branches you
lead me to a stage on the rocks
while Liza's violin echoes the river,
a sound so complete I cry
for my father, still dead,

and the moss, gray-green, clinging dead
beneath our guests. I clutch the white
roses so hard petals cry
from my hands as you
stand beside me in a pool in the river
captured by the cleavage of rocks.

Above the resonance of rocks
we swear to love until we're dead.
On a boulder in the river
surrounded by water, its white
noise, "Love is not love" you
read with resolution and you cry.

Then our kiss is the cry
we toast on the rocks
one mile up the path you
carved with an axe through the dead
of northern Maine, around stands of white
birch, a path that moves like the river.

Like a stone thrown in the river
the end of the day leaves its cry.
I unbutton pearl, take off my white,
let go of dreams grown heavy as rocks
that held me to all things dead.
I want you

with the river tearing at rocks
and the cry of that little death
that fills me with white, and with you.

—- *Edie Mueller*

BIRTHDAY BASH

Mike Dubson

He turned thirteen that day.

"Thank you for the presents and cards, Mother, Aunt Maggie, Aunt Sheila," he said after finishing his cake.

His mother had given him *Bible Passages for the Teenager*, the cake and a card. Great Aunt Maggie had given him a card and *George Bush: Our New President* Aunt Sheila had given him a card.

His grandfather wasn't home. He was still emptying the trash cans and mopping the floors of the elementary school.

He returned to his room, where he was surrounded by fading blue walls and yellowing white woodwork, to work on his homework. Weak light from the January afternoon filtered through the graying white curtains of the twin windows. His desk sat comfortably next to his bed, and to his right, sat his dresser, its mirror flashing back to a cold image of the room. On his dresser were his Bible, his brush and comb, his deodorant. In the far back corner of the room hung a picture that had gone up when his grandmother had the walls and the woodwork painted only months before he was born. Daily, Jesus looked down into the room, His lips curved into a knowing smile.

He sat down at the desk, not looking at the mirror. Not wanting to see his own reflection. The sunlight winged its way across his books, his own small, white hands. Hands that weren't shaking now.

He picked up his history book and began reading. He was in the middle of the Civil War when his mind wandered off....

...and he was walking up the drive toward the two story house, its windows shining with welcome. Bobby and, Peter and Jan were walking toward him, and he hurried to meet them.

"Dad just got home," Peter said. "Mom and Alice are fixing dinner. We were headed to the park for a quick ballgame. Wanna come with us?"

"Yeah," he said eagerly, going with them, being one of them, being a part of them...

..and then the voices cut into his mind, and he heard Great Aunt Maggie and his mother talking. And he was just sitting in his chair, the weak sunlight around him, his book before him.

He heard Aunt Maggie's shoes click and her strong voice.

He looked over at the picture of Jesus. "I hope they don't talk. Please don't let them talk." Jesus merely smiled into the room.

They continued to talk. He looked up from his book, listening,not wanting to, being able not to. He leaned his head onto his hands, then winced, and sat back up. His cheek was still sore from last week. His lip was still sore from last night.

Something thick and ugly suddenly burst inside him, tightening his throat, twisting his lips into a grimace, bulging his eyes in agony. he turned, looked over to the mirror, saw his reflection—and he turned quickly away.

"I'm doing some volunteer work with the Republican Women's Pro-Life Committee this afternoon down at the Baptist Church," Aunt Maggie announced. "Would you like to come along and help? We could always use more people."

"I don't believe so," his mother said.

The shoes clicked. "Well, I'm a little worried, dear. For the last few years, you've just been hiding away here. You've turned away from your friends, your family, your church. You need to get out of this house and get involved with people again. You're nearly thirty years old, dear. We've forgiven you your Sin. The Lord has forgiven you your Sin. Now you must forgive yourself. You can't hide forever."

"I'm not," his mother said thinly. "I just

don't care to work with those church women."

Aunt Maggie's shoes clicked again, and when she spoke, there was doubt in her voice. "Well, I've got to run," she said.

Oh good, he thought, *She's leaving.*

"Let me know if you change your mind. Remember...this kind of life isn't good for you or your son."

The heels clicked. The door shut. And for a minute, there was silence. He pictured his mother, standing by the door, her head bent, her body stiff, watching Aunt Maggie click her way to the car.

"Just like the Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' time, the people who go to church are the most unrighteous!' his mother suddenly shrilled in a high thin voice. Her slippers flapped into the kitchen.

A distant toilet flushed. Aunt Sheila was still here. He turned around to look at Jesus, a mute plea on his face. Jesus smiled down on him.

"Goddamn busybody!" his mother suddenly screamed. "Why doesn't she just leave me alone.?"

He looked down at his book, trying to read, determined to read, determined not to listen, determined not to hear.

Glass crashed in the kitchen, and he jumped. His white, thin hands began shaking. In his mind, he pictured the remains of his cake smashed against the flowered wallpaper.

He heard the squeak of Aunt Sheila's waitress shoes as she went into the kitchen.

"What's the matter?" she asked with irritated impatience.

"She expects me to go to church and work with those women from that church! They made me the laughing stock of this whole town!"

"Oh, *that* again."

"You don't understand anything," his mother said, and there were tears in her anger now. "You've always had everything. You had everything when we were kids. I don't have anything now, and you —"

"Listen," Aunt Sheila interrupted. "I told you where to go to get that operation, and Mother never would have known a thing about it."

Neither his mother nor Aunt Sheila spoke for a minute after that. In his room, he sat, his hands limp and shaking across his desk. His face was white, as white as the weak light streaming into the room, light so very carefully reflected by the mirror. He stared down at his book again, trying to read, forcing himself to read, but his eyes seemed able to read one line: "The nation that emerged from years of total war was not the same."

He heard the squeak of Aunt Sheila's waitress shoes. "I've got to go," she said, abruptly. "I need to pick up the girls from cheerleading practice, and then pick up Don from work." Her voice was proud. "We've got church tonight."

Aunt Sheila's shoes squeaked again. The door slammed shut.

His mother's slippers flopped across the floor.

"I will pray for the sinners who hurt me, and the Lord will pour hot coals over their head!", his mother shrilled. He wasn't sure if she was talking to him or to herself. But, at times like this, he never was.

He gave up on reading, and with a sigh, he let the book close with a thick slap. There was a tiny echo in the still bedroom, and then it was silent.

His mother's slippers flapped their way into the living room, and then he heard the television come on with an electronic click.

He sat at his desk, sitting still. The mirror was over there. Waiting. Teasing. Taunting him to look. To see. And now he wanted to. Oh, he wanted to. But he didn't.

Brother Bill's expressive voice suddenly filled the house.

"I pray that God will help me save my ministry, help me continue to fight Satan. The president is on our side, brethren, so there's nothing we can't do. Send me money! Send me money, so I can Save the Children, Save the Family. Husband, wife, and children, they are the only things that really matter — fornication is Sin. Illegitimate children are Sin. Adultery is...."

The television went off in a fizz of electrons. And then his mother was crying.

I should leave, he thought. *Randy might be home. I should go over to his house, I should get out of here.*

He decided against it as soon as he thought

of it. It was always worse somehow, to come home and find the house silent, knowing his mother had been crying and wailing to empty rooms. It was always worse to come back here, jealous of the homes and families of his neighborhood friends, with the house ripe with the wet smell of snot and tears.

He turned to look at the twin windows, and the weak sunlight hinted at the brisk winds and chilling air of January. *If only it was summer,* he thought. If only he could go outside and pump all the anger out through the sprocket and chain and spokes of his bicycle. If only he could take his baseball bat outside and let his rage fly across the fence into Mrs. Wilson's garden, knocking the heads off her sunflowers and snapping her tulips in half. But he could only sit at his desk, listening to his mother howl, staring down at his hands, now curled into fists to stop their shaking. Now, he could only sit, avoiding the mirror.

"She wanted him, why isn't she here to take care of him?", his mother suddenly wailed as her slippers flopped across the living room to the dining room.

He stared at his hands, curled into fists, resting on that history book, helplessly listening, remembering the day, so many years ago, when his grandma fell down washing dishes, remembering the siren and the flashing red light, remembering crying all that night, and the next day and the next, when they all went to the funeral, remembering his mother quitting her job in the city and coming back to live, remembering how kind she was those first years, remembering how she began to change.

"He's ruined my life!" his mother suddenly screamed, still crying.

He looked over at the picture, and saw Jesus smiling his funny little smile through the dusty sunbeams. They both knew the mirror was there, just a single turn of the head away. Jesus was watching, waiting. Waiting for all he'd seen before.

"He said he was going to marry me!", his mother suddenly wailed, the sobs much louder and deeper now.

The front door suddenly banged open, and there was the sound of lopsided thuds as his grandfather ambled in. In his mind, he heard that chant — the chant he'd heard for years — and his face flamed.

"Thrown out or spit up, your grand daddy cleans it up...."

...and then he was standing in front of his classmates, their usual jeering faces twisted with envy.

"My dad is an architect," he said, trying not to sound too proud, "and I have three brothers and three sisters, and we have a housekeeper that's like part of the family, and she and my Mom take...."

Thumping footsteps broke through his dream as his grandfather lumbered by his room. He turned in his chair to face the picture of Christ.

"I will have a family. When I grow up, I will have a family." Jesus' face stared forward, still smiling the same knowing smile.

"What the hell's going on in here?" his grandfather bellowed. "Christ, you're just like your mother was...always carrying on about something."

"I'm not carrying on about anything," his mother spat. Her voice was full of stifled sobs, and he saw her in his mind. Saw her red and swollen nose, her eyes glistening above tear-stained cheeks. Saw her as he'd seen her many times before.

"My life doesn't matter anymore," his mother said, her voice suddenly flat again. "Jesus loves me now. Sometimes bad things happen to us, so we find Jesus 'cause Jesus wants us to."

"You and your Jesus...for nothing mattering much anymore, you sure do carry on an awful lot about it. I think you better quit sending them TV preachers of yours money...they've been selling you short."

His grandfather's footsteps lumbered into the bathroom, and a stream of urine splashed into the toilet.

"I wish Jesus would come and take away his Christians so I wouldn't have to live here anymore!" his mother sobbed.

He looked over at the picture of Jesus.

"Let me dream," he said. "Please let me dream."

But a weight, heavy and gray like lead, had settled onto him. The dream wouldn't come.

He heard his mother's slippers flapping, and then her bedroom door closed.

He stood up, feeling empty and tight inside. His birthday had gone bad. He walked over to the corner and got his baseball bat, the one Aunt Maggie had given him two birthdays ago.

He moved toward the picture of Christ in the back of his bedroom. There Jesus was, in his long hair and robes, taking care of his sheep. He wasn't one of the sheep in that picture. He'd known that for a long time.

He raised the bat, the bat that had sent quick and cruel death into Mrs. Wilson's garden, and hit the picture. Once. Twice. Three times. The frame cracked, the wire snapped. The picture fell to the floor. Jesus' knowing smile stayed the same, indifferent even to his own fall.

He stood still, breathing rapidly. He could still hear his mother crying in her room. His grandfather had moved into the kitchen. The top on a beer can popped.

He placed the bat down and moved over to the mirror. He saw the reflection of his face, and in his mind, he heard his mother's voice. "He's ruined my life," the voice said.

He stared at his reflection. "Ruined my life." He saw it. "Ruined my life." Saw it turn. "Ruined my life." Saw it turn ugly. Twisted. Unwanted. "Ruined my life." Saw it turn grotesque.

He began hitting his face. Hitting it. And hitting it.

And it was good.

KATE

Jon Platon

He picked up the white carnation and placed it on the end table in the dining room. He admired its beauty and simplicity. It needed to be in a vase, he thought, and he headed for the kitchen.

The phone rang while he was stooped over looking for a vase under the sink. He turned and started at the telephone and let it ring three times before he picked it up.

"Hello," he said blankly into the receiver.

"Hi, Charles. It's Kate. I was wondering if you could suggest a good psychiatrist for me."

"What?"

"I was wondering if you could suggest a good analyst for me to see. I'm having my mother over for the weekend and I'm simply going crazy," she laughed, although not convincingly.

"Are you serious?" he said.

"Of course I'm serious. That woman drives me completely batty and if I don't find someone to talk to I know I'll go crazy."

She had a very sexy voice over the phone, he thought. It was no surprise since he did find Kate attractive. Around the office she never wore anything overly suggestive or provocative, but she was well admired among her male coworkers.

"Why did you invite her for the weekend if she drives you crazy?"

"I don't know really. I just haven't seen her for awhile. I do miss her. But any longer than a day with her!" Kate let out a huff. "Anyway, what are you doing? Did I take you away from anything important?"

"No. I was just looking for something."

"Oh. Well, the real reason I called was to ask your advice. You've been around a lot. I mean, you've lived in town a lot longer than I have. Do you have any suggestions where I could take my mother? She's coming in from Nebraska and she's never seen New England."

"I don't suppose it makes a difference where you take her. If she's never been here, she'll probably enjoy anything. The Aquarium, maybe? The Science Museum. Or the Fine Arts Museum?" he suggested. "Although I don't know if she's into that sort of thing. You could always try the Pru or the Hancock Tower."

"That sounds great. Now all I have to do is convince her to get on the subway." She laughed again, her familiar and playful laugh.

"The subway? Forget it. You're better off dragging her around in a taxi; if you can find one."

Silence.

He could feel his stomach turning and his imagination took off in all directions. Why was he talking to Kate, the most attractive woman in his department? What did she really want? He had thought she had a boyfriend. But even if she didn't, why would she call him? It was true he was her immediate supervisor and she may have taken on a mentor-student relationship with him, but it sounded too much out of the ordinary for her to be calling him at home for a personal reason.

She was smiling on the other end of the line. "What are you thinking?'

He didn't answer right away. " I don't know. I was wondering why you were calling."

She stopped smiling. "I was just sitting here watching TV and I was wondering what you were doing."

"Oh."

"Anyway, I'll let you go. I'll see you at work tomorrow. OK?"

"Sure," he said.

"Thank God it's Friday."

"Yeah."

"Bye, Charles."

"Bye."

He held the receiver for a few moments and smiled at the refrigerator. There were notes and photographs held on by magnets, but he saw through them.

He put the phone down and walked into the living room. Lying on the couch after dinner, he fell asleep with the TV on all night.

In the morning, he showered, dressed, and left for work. He had forgotten to put the carnation in a vase.

The day was hectic; everyone was working frantically on the Breman account. Bill Myers, from corporate finance, stuck his head into Charles' office with a foolish grin.

"Come up with any white knights yet, Charlie?"

"I have some ideas."

"Oh? Do you want to share them?"

"I'll have them ready at four."

Bill walked in, playfully picking up a crystal paperweight that was on Charles' desk.

"Have you seen Kate?" Bill asked

"She's been in and out of here all day. Probably down Personnel."

"I need to get in touch with her before the meeting. Could you make sure she sees me before the meeting, when you see her?"

"No problem."

Bill walked out, but not before he turned and tossed the crystal back at Charles. "Think fast!"

At five-thirty, he was packing his attaché. From the corner of his eye, he saw Kate walking in.

"Long meeting, huh?" she said.

"Too long," he sighed. "So, what do you think? You think they'll but it?"

"I don't see why not. Your presentation was flawless."

"Our presentation was flawless," he corrected her.

"Right," she smiled. And the butterflies took flight inside his stomach. "Listen," she said. "Are you doing anything right now?"

"Not really," he said.

"Why don't we have a drink? I think we both could use one after that ordeal."

"Don't you have to get your mother or something?"

"She's not coming until tomorrow. What do you say?"

"Sure."

They sat in a cozy corner at Bennigan's. She had a Strawberry Margarita and he had a Screwdriver.

"Here's to the Breman buyout." She lifted her glass and toasted. "May they find their knight in shining armor soon."

"I'll drink to that," he tipped her glass.

They drank and were silent, each looking off into the crowd in an eternal struggle to avoid that lock-stare.

"So," he began. "Farm-bred girl, state university, out in the big city. Why did you come here?"

"I was always excited about New York. I settled for Boston. The place is a little slower, which suits me just fine. Did you grow up here?"

"Yeah. Although I do have my eyes on Manhattan."

She smiled mischievously. "We've known each other for almost a year now and it sounds like we just met."

"I know," he agreed, staring down at the table. "It feels like we just met."

"It doesn't help."

"What do you mean?" He looked up.

"It doesn't help our conversation any. We're acting like strangers."

"Sorry." He smiled, this time, fully appreciated her beauty. She was beautiful. And when they had had their last drinks and were walking around Downtown Crossing, he wanted to hold her hand.

They walked slowly, stopping to stare at window displays. But all they could see was each other's reflection against the glass.

"Don't you hate it when Bill Myers sticks his nose into your office for no good reason other than to annoy you?"

"I don't particularly like it, " he said.

"He's really irritating sometimes, you know? Today, he wanted me to present our cases before the meeting."

"Yeah, he asked me that, too."

"Yes, but did he offer for you to do it in his jacuzzi?"

"No," Charles laughed. "He didn't give me that option."

"What a pervert."

"Well?" He turned to her.

"Well what? You think I'd take him up on that? That's disgusting. He's really in love with

himself."

"Why not? I would have taken him up on it. And I happen to be in love with him."

They burst into laughter as the sky followed suit and a downpour erupted. They ran into the Orange Line stairwell and shook the rain off of themselves.

The stench of urine invaded their noses as they noticed an old man sleeping in the corner. He was using a newspaper as a blanket.

"Do you have your car?" he said.

"I take the T."

"Come on. I'll give you a ride."

He pulled off some of the old man's newspapers to use as an umbrella.

"You're awful," she said.

"He won't mind."

Together, they made a run for the parking garage, their bodies touching. When they reached the garage, they were out of breath. She looked up at him, panting, their smiles disappearing. They waited, for an eternity, but neither moved.

They drove silently. A mystical sheet lay across the Back Bay before it began to drizzle again. He stopped at her apartment on Marlborough Street.

"Thanks, Charlie. Do you want to come up for a while?"

"I should get home."

She was quiet and stared out ahead. "My mother won't be coming in until tomorrow afternoon. You could stay, you know, if you wanted to."

He didn't answer. He was shaking like a child inside.

"No strings attached," she went on. "I wouldn't expect..."

"Kate," he stopped her. "I can't."

She looked up at him. Although she knew the wall between them was not very thick, the chasm not so deep, she wouldn't dare to cross.

"Where is she?" she asked.

He smiled, looking away. "Visiting her mother."

She nodded to herself. "Goodnight, Charles. I'll see you Monday."

"Yeah," he said. She closed the door and he drove off.

When he returned home, he found the white carnation and put it in a vase. Within a few hours it seemed to come back to life. He placed it on the coffee table and fell asleep on the couch with the TV on.



Liliana E. Jurewiez

Confessional

Gerry J. Waggett

They had missed confession. By exactly how many minutes, they couldn't tell—Jamie's watch had stopped just before three o'clock—but it couldn't have been all that long. When they had come into the lower chapel, there were still a couple of people left. Some old guy and his granddaughter were kneeling at the altar rail, finishing up their penance. The two of them had since left through the side door, probably headed up to the five o'clock Mass.

The lower chapel was in darkness. The custodian never bothered to turn on the lights for confession. Dennis liked it like this, dark and gloomy. It reminded him of the catacombs in Rome they read about in history.

Red and blue candles glowed in either side of the altar, each one lit for some intention or some dearly departed soul. Either the red or the blue candles cost a dollar more than the other to light, but he couldn't remember which.

Aside from the candles and the stained glass windows, the chapel was basically brown. The pews were varnished oak, and the walls were paneled. The floor tiles alternated chocolate brown with beige.

Dennis was sitting sideways in the last pew. Jamie was one in front of him. They were just catching their breath. After sprinting, jogging and sprinting the ten blocks between the park and the church, they were both pretty well winded—Jamie much more so than Dennis. They both had the same build, tall and heavy, but Jamie was fat big, and Dennis was muscle big. Their size made them both first-choice picks for Saturday afternoon football games.

Jamie had a light, practically orange shade of red hair, which he hated. He said it made him look like a clown. So he kept it short, almost a whiffle. Dennis, like most of the eighth grade, was dirty blonde. He wore his hair a little longer than the nuns approved of, but since he was an honors student, he got away with it.

Organ music vibrated the ceiling above their heads. Mass would be beginning any minute now. Dennis would have gone up and gotten it out of the way if he had been dressed better. Sneakers were semi-acceptable but grey sweats, especially muddy grey sweats didn't cut it, not even for a Saturday afternoon Mass.

He didn't like walking into a church looking like this. Today would bring the total to four weeks that he missed confession thanks to Jamie. All in all, it wasn't a bad record considering that most kids in the eighth grade never went. Around the summer between fifth and sixth, the cool kids had quit going. By the end of the school year, everyone else, even the good kids, had tapered off.

Dennis still went because his mother hounded him. Jamie went because Dennis dragged him along.

When Dennis got home, his mother would ask him if he'd gone to confession. It would be the first question out of her mouth. He would spare himself the lecture and say, yeah, he did. He could just add the lie on to his list of sins for next week.

His mother kept after him about going to Mass every Sunday, about getting there on time, about making confession a minimum of once every other week... She herself went to church twice a year; Christmas and Easter. When Sundays rolled around, she always had some excuse for staying home, usually her bursitis flaring up. Instead of church, she tuned into the service for Shut-Ins on the radio and listened to that while she fixed dinner.

Jamie's mother didn't go to church either. A divorcee, she assumed herself excommunicated.

Dennis slapped Jamie on the shoulder. He spoke in a whisper. "You ready to go? We outta here?"

"Yeah. You goin' back to the park or

home?"

As much as he preferred the park, he wouldn't have time to get into another game. "Home".

Dennis slid out of the end of the pew. There were two confessional booths on this side of the church. From the knob of the one closer to him hung a white plaque with Father Miller's name in gothic lettering.

On either side of the door, brown curtains came down to just half a foot above the floor. They reminded him of the dressing rooms in those cheap bargain stores his mother dragged him off to. He'd been behind the brown curtain enough times to know what the cubicle looked like. And he'd been on this side enough times to know that the curtains didn't protect anyone's privacy.

He checked up and down the aisle and then tried the knob. It turned. Why he imagined it might not, he couldn't figure. Maybe because he'd always heard how sacred and how secret the confessional was.

"What are you doin' ?" Jamie had come up behind him.

"I don't know. Just checkin' it out."

It was a little exciting, finally taking a peek into the mystery room, the room where the priest heard all the sins in the parish. He prepared himself to be disappointed.

The cell was narrow, smaller than the closet in his bedroom. It fit the one hardback chair with only a little room to spare.

A string was dangling in his face. Dennis tugged on it. A bare light bulb glowed in the center of the ceiling.

The walls were the same as on the sinners side: the bottom half paneled, the top a white styrofoamlike material with a million little holes for soundproofing. In the middle of the wall facing him, about a foot above the back of the chair, hung a simple wooden cross.

Dennis sat down in the chair. Underneath it were a bible with a soft brown cover and a pack of Winstons. Sister Albertus had the whole class praying every day for Father Miller's throat cancer, and he was still smoking away. The man had to have a lot of faith in God and Sister Albertus.

"This is you." Jamie smiled and nodded his head.

"You think so?"

"Oh yeah."

His mother would love nothing more than for him to become a priest. She always was praying for him to find his calling. Of course, if she saw him now, sitting here like this, she would beat the shit out of him.

"Hey, you wanna play Father Miller?"

Dennis smiled. "You wanna?"

"Yeah."

With that, Jamie shut the door. Dennis heard the creak of the kneeler as Jamie got himself into position.

In the middle of the soundproofing, about level with Dennis's shoulder, there was a wooden slat with a knob. There was another one parallel to it on Dennis's right side. He slid the one on his left open. A black wire grill was supposed to protect the confessor's identity, assuming that a priest who'd been around as long as Father Miller had couldn't recognize his parishioners by voice.

There was a moment of silence. The priest was supposed to say something first. Dennis just couldn't think of it. So he settle for "Good afternoon."

Jamie played right along. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

Dennis made the sign of the cross over the grill. It seemed appropriate and harmless enough.

"It's been three weeks since my last confession."

"And in that time, what have you done?" Father Miller's throat cancer made him easy to imitate. Everybody at school, including the girls, could do him.

"I lied a total of 792 times, I've disobeyed by mother 876 times—no, no. Make that 877 times. I didn't take out the trash last night. I swore about 923 times. Do 'Hell' and 'Damn' count?"

"Why they most certainly do. Can you think of anything worse than condemning a fellow one of God's children to the fiery pits of H-E-double hockey sticks for all eternity?"

"No, Father, I can't."

"Continue." Dennis reached under the

chair and grabbed the cigarettes. He slid one out of the pack and stuck it between his lips. Father Miller hadn't left any matches behind.

"I got into about a thousand fights with my brothers."

"Do you have an exact number?"

"I'm sorry, Father, I don't."

Dennis took an imaginary puff on the cigarette. "Well, my son, how can you expect to be forgiven for your sins unless you tell me what they are?"

Sister Albertus advised keeping a record of sins and penance, what she called a "heavenly bankbook." The woman belonged back teaching the second grade.

"Go on, go on, my son. Is there anything else you'd like to confess?" He was losing Father Miller. It was an easy voice to do, but a hard one to maintain. After a couple of minutes, it hurt to talk like that.

"I did drugs about three weeks ago. I smoked a joint."

Dennis remembered Jamie mentioning it. They got the pot off of somebody's brother in high school.

"And I never mentioned this before, but about two months ago, I got drunk. I was at a party, and I had a few beers."

Dennis was with him that time. They polished off a six pack together. Like Jamie, he hadn't confessed it either. He didn't think it counted as a sin.

"I masturbate."

Dennis broke into a short spasm of laughter. The cigarette fell out of his mouth. Overly biological words like "masturbation", "penis", "urinate" and "bowels" gave him the giggles.

"That's good. You were getting kind of boring there for a minute."

"I masturbate a lot. At least once a night."

Dennis shifted into a very bad imitation of Sigmund Freud. "If you do not stop, you will grow hair on your palms and you will go blind."

"I can't stop."

"Then I suggest you buy a very sharp razor and a pair of eyeglasses."

"I wish...I could learn...to control myself."

Jamie sounded strange, as though he were crying. He wasn't kidding around.

Dennis put his hand on the wire grill. "Hey, Jamie. Calm down. It's no big deal. We all..." He looked at his palm. It was an embarassing thing to admit. "We all..."

Jamie took in a deep breath. "I thought about Elaine Drummy last night."

A good choice. She was in their class. She had blond hair, blue eyes, and she held the distinction of being the first non-fat girl in the class to grow tits.

"I keep thinking about her."

"Jamie, I gotta get goin'. Dinner's probably ready. And you know my mother." Dennis pulled himself from the chair.

"I keep thinking about what I did to her."

He sat back down. "What'd you do to her, Jamie?"

"I touched her tit."

Dennis half-smiled. "Don't worry. It's not so bad." He himself had touched Peggy McGill's tits, but Peggy had sworn him to secrecy about that, especially if he ever wanted to get any farther.

"But she didn't want me to."

Dennis could see him shaking his head. He didn't want to listen to any more of the story. He wanted to get the hell out of here.

"I went over to her house. She was alone. I kept daydreaming about getting her in the house alone. She was wearing her uniform, but without the vest. Just the white skirt. And you could see her bra underneath."

In spite of himself, Dennis felt the first growth of an erection in his pants.

"I told her I needed to borrow a book. She let me in. As soon as she shut the door, I grabbed her and I kissed her...on the mouth. I thought she liked it because she didn't push me away. Not at first. Then I tried to put a little tongue in it."

Dennis almost laughed. He remembered instructing Jamie how to kiss in a very bad French accent: "Always be sure to put a little tongue in it."

"That's when she pushed me away. She told me to get out, her mother would be home any minute. That's when I grabbed her wrist and felt her up with my free hand. I only got to feel one

breast. I just wanted a feel. I just put my hand on it and gave it a slight squeeze."

Dennis remembered how easily Peggy had unbuttoned her shirt for him, and there was no bra underneath.

"That's when she started crying. So I let go and left. I told her I was sorry. And I was."

Dennis thought about Elaine. She hadn't been acting strange lately. Not that he noticed. But he noticed that Jerry hadn't been either.

"I was so scared she was going to tell her mother or her father. I skipped school the next two days. I even thought about running away. But she mustn't have told anyone, right?"

"Right."

"I am so ashamed of what I did."

Dennis put his hand to the grill. "It's all right." It really wasn't, but what was he supposed to say?" Jerry was his best friend.

"For these and all my sins which I cannot recall, I am sorry."

"I know you are, Jamie." Dennis stared at the floor. He had never discussed sex with Jamie before. Not seriously. Everybody joked in the schoolyard and up the park about jerking off and making out under the bridge. But no one was ever serious.

"Jerry..."

"No. Say it like Father Miller."

Dennis fitted on his Father Miller voice again. "My son..." He then picked up a cigarette for effect. What would Father Miller say? "As you grow into manhood, you must learn to control your...your urges, and you must take into account the full consequences of all your actions."

That was good. Father Miller was always talking about actions and their consequences. Every sermon he gave ended up with the same moral about taking into account the consequences of your actions.

"Am I forgiven?"

"Yes. In the name of the Father, the Son...", he followed along with his hand, "...and the Holy Spirit, by the power invested in me—by God—you are forgiven." There was some prayer of absolution which should have been said, but Dennis didn't even know it well enough to fake his way through it.

He merely made another sign of the cross and said, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

When Dennis stood up, he realized that his erection had disappeared.

"Father?"

"Yes?"

"What is my penance?"

That was a good question. Father Miller assigned ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys for the usual batch of venial sins. Dennis couldn't imagine what something like this would merit.

He gave it a moment's thought. "For your sins, say one hundred Our Fathers, one hundred Hail Marys and make fifty perfect Acts of Contritions."

"Thank you, Father."

He slid the wooden slat back across the wire grill. The kneeler creaked as Jamie got up. Dennis heard the rubber soles of his sneakers squeak towards the alter. He gave himself a few minutes before he came out of the confessional.

When he did, Jamie was kneeling at the alter rail, right where the grandfather and grandmother had been. The prayers would take him the better part of the night if he bothered to say them all.

Dennis tended to think he would.

At the door of the Church, he paused to dip his hand in the basin of holy water. There would be no trouble at all of him keeping this little scene a secret. He never wanted to discuss it again, not even with Jamie himself. Somehow, he just wanted to forget it ever happened. According to Sr. Albertus, that was what confession was all about, wiping the slate clean.

Table By The Window

I hate her
simply
as she sits next to you
She laughs
without listening
But I do....
 and memorize every word, expression
 every lift of your brow
and dream replies.

I sit with discarded napkins, empty cups,
drinking you in.

— Kathleen Santry

Pas de deux

You enter slowly
adept enigmatic
I muse
about (risk) (possibility) (pain) (love)
you kiss
away
the first and the third.

— Sandra Heddon

Hitchhiking, 1982

In the car hurtling
through lightless streets,
from the wheel to
the rider's knee.

His voice offers.

The adolescent body
falls out the door
to roll onto the shoulder's rocks.
Pebbles bite his cheeks
as the hungry car
speeds away.

— Christopher Jackson

PORNOGRAPHIC

I was eleven I think,
or maybe I was almost-thirteen,
during that time when my mind was full
of images that swelled like blood and felt
like warm soft bread,
that time when my breasts were aching
bruises that had not yet begun to heal,
when I found the dirty pictures on the sidewalk.

They were pages of a magazine,
and they had that slick finish,
the kind that if you hold the paper a certain way
the image will disappear and then
flash suddenly into focus when you move your
hand.
I stooped to pick them up, curious about
the bright colors and glossy finish.
Half standing and half bent over
I realized what they were and froze.
I felt that a van with a soft couch inside
and curtains on the windows must have been
driving by — mirrored sunglasses
looking out at me.
I thought I saw a man with a white face
and a dark shadow between his legs smile
then disappear behind a curtain.

A musty basement in summer swept over me
and the picture of a fat man in polyester
stung my brain
as I stood up straight and squeezed
my arms around my chest.

- *Darragh Murphy*

The Undying Wind

Someone is going to kill
somebody in a moment
The wind has blown too hard
for too long today.
It spits dirt in our eyes,
it corks our throats
when we speak.
It hurls empty taxis
past outstretched arms,
it chokes us when we scream.
Someone is going to pull
a gun from some pocket
to shoot the wind.
And somebody will be in the way.

- *Christopher Jackson*

HOOPS

Huge square boxes of dirty red bricks.
The words are crack smack suck treat dizzle,
never drugs.
Standing watch, the warriors, the generals, the
losers always kids,
and watching us, always cops
or priests preaching *shoot hoops*
and pushing hope.

The mothers are concerned and hope
to hit mega-bucks so they can get out of the
bricks
into a house with a driveway to shoot hoops
not drugs
or cops
or other kids.

And the generals, now in their 30's, still call
themselves kids.
They don't even want to hope
to get out. They're safe from the cops
and jobs and the world when they're in the
bricks.
The money is good selling drugs
under the hoops.

The NBA is a joke, standing under these hoops.
We're not little rich kids—
Biff and Tiffany don't do drugs.
Their parents are full of hope.
Their fireplace is made of friendly bricks,
and when it snows they'll get a ride home from
the cops.

Last night I got beat up by the cops
in a paddy wagon under the hoops.
When they were done they poured me back into
the bricks
to be cared for by the generals, the kids
who filled me with hope
that someday I'd get rich selling drugs.

Then they gave me some drugs.
I don't hate cops.
I was robbed of my hope
by these hoops
and the kids
and the bricks.

But the bricks and the drugs
are forever. The kids seem to age while the cops
get younger, and I'm still under these hoops.

-Jack Leach

DAVID

After the session at the local hospital

(And why was my family
Out on stage?)

I wanted to shout,
"No, don't take David.
Leave my brother alone!"
But they wouldn't have listened.
Not after seeing David slam his head
Against the safety-glass pane,
Over and over, though neither
His head nor the window cracked.

I'd grab David's hand,
And we'd hide in the night.

(Almost like when he'd come
To my room after lights out.
We knew that night monsters
Are cowards and won't attack two.
Dad would snap, "Why don't you
Do what you're told?"
Then drag David crying
Away down the hall,
Eyes reaching back for me
Over his shoulder.)

We'd hide from the hospital,
The ambulance,
And those two men
Trying to convince David
What a good idea it was,

"Please be good and get inside,"
Their postures lied,
"We're not taking you far."

(Why haven't the props
Been rolled out of sight?)

Mom and I stood there.
I felt half tempted to wave
While the back door was shut
And the engine started,
Standing as calm as if David
Were just off to college,
And would be back for Christmas.

A chunk of cries
Was stuck in my throat
Which kept me from screaming,
"He did it for show,
He wouldn't have hurt her!"

(At least that's what
David told me.)

But I just held on to Mother
Like she was my little girl,
As she starts crying instead,
And begs me to tell
If she did the right thing.

(God, you can turn on
The houselights now...
Please.)

- *Nikki Michellé*

Pale Light

Pale light floods
Through arched windows;
Moving dusty air
That blurs my sights.
Winds, cold and damp
Drift through broken pains
Disrupting elegant silks
Draped from molded casings.
Each step reveals
Splintered glass hiding on the floorboards.

This room has been part of me for many years.
The glass is new;
It represents my most recent pains,
The absence of love,
Which burns me to the souls of my feet.

— R.T. Rooney

A Window Facing South

In the field beyond
my window facing south
I watch summer
change, fall.
My toes root.
Dawn becomes
a place to sleep
and time
stretches my back.
When spring returns
my fingers sprout leaves.
Moss grows up my sides.
At midnight
I rattle my branches
to chase away fear.

— Edie Mueller

"...and may perpetual light shine upon you"

Bob Furlong

David woke up one colorless morning and the world had collapsed. He decided to stay in bed a few minutes longer than usual, seeing that he no longer had to work. Most likely, it was just another pile of rubble, identical to everything else he saw outside.

David's apartment was a mess. The air was still a little dusty from the plaster that had fallen, and he no longer had a roof to cover him. He smiled and shook his head at the mirror that lay flat on the floor. After his shoes were on, he stood up and decided to take a long walk.

It wasn't suprising that the streets were quiet, seeing that everybody was dead, but screams still hung over the world like a light fog that would evaporate as soon as the sun came up. But David wondered if the sun would bother to even look at this mess ever again. He was going to miss the sun.

He walked for a few hours and finally came to his old house. It was still smoking from where the furnace used to be, and the once 60-foot structure was now about eight feet high. He laughed when he thought of how many hours it had probably taken to build. But, it had all been destroyed in one night. He moved closer to the pile of debris and stood on top of what used to be his basement room.

He thought of the blue carpet and the small blue curtains that covered the rectangular basement windows. For a moment, he heard the heat clanging in the pipes and the furnace kicking in. He felt the warmth of the heat and saw the afternoon sun (that he would perhaps never see again) coming through the gauze-like curtains bathing his feet in a pale blue light that would only last the width of the window, and then would be gone. It was gone.

David knelt down, face in hands, and began to mourn.

It was four o'clock when David reached his university on the other side of town. He had seen a few people on his way to the university, but most of them died right there before his eyes, and as for the others, they probably wouldn't make it to nightfall.

The university was a collapsed mammoth. The corpse itself was too large to walk on, so David strolled alongside as close as he could. The landscape around the area retained its loveliness. It was like a cemetary on a September afternoon; there was death everywhere the eye could see, but it was so peaceful, quiet, and beautiful.

David came across to where the English department once stood. Everywhere he looked, he could see books lying lifelessly in the debris with the exception of a few books that still waved their pages in the hopes that help would arrive soon. David was sad and picked up one of these fluttering creatures.

"While they fought for the privilege of carrying him on their shoulders along the steep encampment by the cliffs, men and women became aware for the first time of the desolation of their streets, the dryness of their courtyards, the narrowness of their dreams as they faced the splendor and beauty of their drowned man. They let him go without an anchor so that he could come back if he wished and whenever he wished, and they all held their breath for the fraction of centuries the body took to fall into the abyss. They did not need to look at one another to realize that they were no longer all present, that they would never be."

Gabriel Garcia Marquez
The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World

David put the book under his arm and walked toward the water. The wind picked up and the air began to bite at his bare arms. The sound of the crashing waves on the rocks further ahead grew louder as he approached the plateau overlooking the ocean and what was left of the black and white world.

He sat on a rock and read the story through. He couldn't understand why the people of the village were so upset. After all, Esteban, the drowned man, was only a stranger to them. Yet, they had gone to such an extent to dress him up nice

and make sure that he was comfortable before they sent him on his perpetual journey.

"Why did these people mourn over somebody who died?" he thought. "And a stranger at that."

And he closed the book and thought about what he had just read. At that moment, the angry, red sun revealed itself and sat on the horizon. David stood up and took a good look at the world, now colored red, and for the first time that day, he saw the destruction that lay about him, and he understood why the people mourned for Esteban.

David no longer mourned for the things and materials he so loved in life, but for the people, because they were the only ones that could love him after he was gone. And with that, he could never die.

He turned to the sun and hoped it would mourn for him as he took a step forward and began his perpetual journey.



"When From The Halls Of Shadowland"

Mary L. Scheller

Time moved slowly in Riverview in the summer. As slowly as the pages of Grandma Henderson's Bible, which was her daily companion on long afternoons. Come September, everybody was ready to roll out from under that hot, moist blanket of heat and stand at attention for the fall. The tar-topped road, which wound down past the neatly kept suburban lawns had hardened by then, and Grandma moved her chair a foot back from the window and set her white lace shawl down close by and within easy reach, just in case of a chill.

Occasionally she would stop her reading and rest her hands, as wrinkled and rough as the talons of a bird, on her lap. There was always much to see out the window, but nowadays, much of it was in her mind. Strange, all the pictures, how they would pop out, and with just the blink of an eye, out would come another one.

Take the rambling roses outside the window, now turning that deep, amber shade of pink, the last of the year. Same color as her graduation dress from the eighth grade; and suddenly she was in the classroom, feeling so proud and pretty. Her mother had rouged her lips, her dress caught the sun and just seemed to glitter. But you couldn't run in a dress like that, needed a good pair of dungarees. Used to like to run, was good at it.

The race, the county fair. Just a little splash in a small community overshadowed by the big city. Just a little to-do. Jam, made from grapes the size of walnuts, in big jars covered with wax, apple pies, blackberry cobblers. She remembered how her hands would hurt from the stickers when picking the moist juicy berries and how they turned a dark red-black.

But it was the race she remembered. Couldn't let that Fletcher girl win, that strange hillbilly. And she didn't win. Why couldn't she have tried harder? Remembered she was last, and couldn't believe she was catching up. Remembered the way the oncoming air choked at the throat and the feel of the hard ground beneath her, how it seemed to be flying. Then that skinny little thing, the one that had that funny way of walking, kind of a prance, like she was above everybody else. The one with the strange hands, kept
them hanging down off her wrist all the time. What was her name? Letitia, Letitia Moore. Letitia saw her, stuck out her foot in the path, and down she went, right in the dirt. Couldn't let Fletcher beat her, anybody else, but not Fletcher.

Her dream was broken by the opening of the door and the arrival of Laura, her daughter-in-law, carrying a tray with coffee and a sweet bun.
"Where's my big cup, this ain't enough to feed a bird," Grandma said.
"You broke it, remember, last week. You dropped it."

"Oh. Well, I need a big cup. Just because I'm old and skinny don't mean I don't want a big cup of coffee. And you let me fix it tomorrow. This is my house and I can fix my own coffee. Tastes like dishwater."

"I don't know how dishwater tastes, Bess. Never had it, have you?"

"Yes, it's right here. And don't you get smart with me, young lady. This is my house and don't you forget that. Now, where are my cigarettes?"

"They're right here."

"Thank you. What are you standing there like that for? Leave me in peace. All I want is a little peace."

"I'm afraid you'll drop it, as you've done before."

"Can't even have a smoke like I want to. Never did like her," she thought. "Liked the first one better, but she was too frail, died young. So he goes out and gets another one, hard as nails. Thinks she owns this place. This is my house as long as I'm alive."

"And don't ask me how I'm feeling. I'm fine. Just my leg giving me a little trouble, but otherwise, I'm fine. I noticed the hedge outside is getting too high; tomorrow I think I'll go out and trim it. Probably the grass needs cutting too. Where's the lawn mower?"

"Down the cellar where it always is."

"Well, you and me, we'll work on the grounds tomorrow before winter comes."

She took a few puffs from the cigarette, then rested her hands on her lap and closed her eyes. Laura swiftly removed the cigarette, picked up the tray and left the old lady to slip back into her dreams.

Maud, the old white cat, curled herself up in a ball of sun that she found on the floor and a slice of the light settled on Grandma's hair and spun some silver. And so the sun and Grandma and the cat all rested together for a while.

Outside, the wind picked up some speed and the rambling pink roses did a little tap dance against the window. And somewhere in Grandma's mind there was a rapping on a door and she answered.

"That must be Mack," she thought, "forgot his key again." She turned the latch and let him in.

"This is not one of our friendly chats, Bess. I've come here to tell you something."

"Well, can't you even sit down?"

A tall white haired man, slightly bent over, made his way to the sofa.

"I can't stay long."

"Well, you never do anymore."

"Bessie, I'm very displeased with the way you've been treating Laura lately."

Grandma bent her head down, and said, "I know, I know. Sometimes it's so hard. It's so hard being old."

"Now, she's our son's wife."

"Well, I have to be ornery, otherwise they'll think I've given up."

"What's this about you mowing the lawn tomorrow? You can't mow that lawn, you know that; you can't even outta that chair without help."

"I don't particularly like the way things are turning out," she said.

"You have to learn to accept things, Bessie and sometimes it's not easy."

"Now take that young doctor they brought up here the other day..." she said.

"They were only doing that for your own good."

"Talked about me like I wasn't here. Like I didn't have a brain in my head. And so loud. Think I was hard of hearing. I can hear as good as he can, maybe better, considering all the things young'uns put in their ears nowadays, walkathons, and such, and playing their music so loud it could burst an eardrum."

"They were only doing that to help you."

"I know, I know. I'll try to be better."

"Laura will be coming up here tonight for a chat and a visit like she always does. You be nice and sociable, and charming, like I know my Bessie can be. Like the woman I married."

"Before you go, can you help me with my checkbook. I think we need a new lawn mower."

Grandma felt a light brush against her cheek and awoke disappointed.

She had mistaken the light touch of Maud's paw against her cheek for Mack's kiss. "There I go off again," she thought, smiling to herself, as she nestled the cat in her arms.

After reading her Bible for a while and eating lunch, she drew her chair closer to the window, and waited for the children next door to come out in the backyard. Sure enough, a little girl opened the door and walked down the steps. In one hand she was carrying a basket of clothes and in the other a scruffy little boy around two years of age. She was about ten years old, dressed in a red plaid dress, which was partially covered by a shabby blue coat, which hung on her like a long drape. There was not a glimmer of softness about her, she was all long, straight, stiff lines, like someone about to ward off a blow, ready to fight it off at a moment's notice. The severity of her expression was heightened by her fine, straight brown hair which hung loosely around her face.

She put the basket on the grass and as gently as one would place a porcelain teacup on a saucer, set the little boy down on the cement step. Occasionally, while hanging the clothes, she would glance at the child, who had long since left his perch

to explore all the wonders of the backyard. As he made a dart toward the hedge, where in the darkness any number of terrors and mysteries awaited, she ran after him, caught him in her arms and took him back into the house.

Grandma, too, went into a house, a different house with a door that had never completely closed throughout her life.

It was December and the house was held in the grip of the icy fingers of winter.

"I'm not going, I'm not going!" Bess said, her thin arms grasping the sides of the couch. "And you can't make me!'

"But you have to go to school, they'll come and arrest me," said her mother.

"And it's your fault you lost all your hair. If you hadn't been playing in that dirty water this never would have happened. It's your fault you got that fever."

"They all hate me, they're afraid to get near me. When I walk down the aisle they say, 'You can catch it from Fletcher.' Please don't make me go, Mama, please. I'll get a job, I'll do anything."

"You can't get a job, child, you're only ten years old."

"Come on Bess," said her brother, who was one year younger.

"We'll be late. Besides, I don't think you're weird. I don't even notice you don't have any hair. Nobody can see it with that bonnet you have on anyway. Nobody knows."

"Maybe you'll start a new fashion," laughed her mother.

Bess smiled wanely, dried her swollen red eyes, and headed out the door.

Outside, the wind whipped against the frozen limbs of the trees, scattering their path with jagged pieces of ice as sharp as small knives, as they made their way, hand in hand, up the hill. The cold froze the sun in the sky, froze the air around her, froze the tears to her cheeks. It left a jagged scar, which never completely closed, which would reopen again and again for the rest of her life.

Grandma blinked, closed the corner of the lacy white curtain, at the same time pulling the tattered gauze over that window of her mind.

"Children," she thought, "travel in packs, like dogs. Suppose nature designed it that way, makes it safer, easier. But heaven help the child who's different; the cruelty of children is a horror, a terror, because they have not yet learned how to be kind."

"And old Mack knew all about that. Had a bitter taste of it when he got polio as a child. By the time he was twenty the limp was all but gone. And then he met me. Like a cat, he said, like an alley cat I was, living in the shadow of a darkness, haunted by the cries of a little girl inside, afraid to be touched, afraid to touch. Yes, he knew all about that."

Later on in the evening, just before bedtime, she mentioned something to Laura which had been nagging at her all day.

"What about those two children next door? Where's the mother? I never see her."

"Oh, them. They're a very rough kind of people, Bess, I don't think you'd want to know about them. I think she works during the day."

"I thought it'd be nice to have them over to have some ice cream and cake. A little visit. And I'll introduce the girl to Maud; I think she'd like that."

"Well, it's up to you. But they'll turn this place into a shambles."

"Well, the older you get, the less you worry about things," she said.

"Are you all tucked in, all comfy now?" Laura asked.

"Yes, I'm fine, darlin', and thank you."

Laura gave the old lady a kiss on the cheek and left, closing the door gently behind her.

Grandma looked over at Maud's corner and saw her there, stretched out with her head snuggled inside an ancient bedroom slipper. She switched off the lamp and a silver beam of light caught her glance and took it straight to the moon, shining there like a satin slipper on a deep blue velvet rug.

"Good night, Mack, you old codger," she said.

The door opened and Laura asked, "Did you say something, Bess?"

"I said good night, honey, sweet dreams."



Anne Digate

Hairdo

Is she
wearing a wig?
Or did
her poodle die
and she can't
get it off her mind?

- *Christopher Jackson*

The Brothers Bloomberg

Barry Shulak

The yellow Bluebird bus — number 33 — pulled up to the front door of Filmore Elementary School promptly at 3:30 p.m. As usual, Hazel Blechfield was at the wheel. When Howie Bloomberg boarded the bus, he stopped to speak to the driver.

"Hazel, " he said, almost inaudibly, as the other kids brushed past him. "I lost my hat. Did you find it? A blue stocking cap?"

Hazel wheezed slightly as she turned all 225 pounds of herself in her seat to retrieve the cardboard box she kept behind it. After a quick look, Hazel tilted the box and held it very close to Howie's face so he could see that the hat wasn't there. There were only several odd mittens and a few scarves — all gray. Howie smelled cardboard and wool. He frowned; Hazel shrugged indifferently.

Indifference was the closest Hazel ever came to friendliness. Most of the kids feared her. But, she had the best safety record of any driver in the school system's bus fleet. To the casual observer, it would appear that Hazel was greatly protective of the children with whose safety she was entrusted.

On occasional mornings, for instance, when a car would pass while the bus' flashers were on, she'd jam on her horn so emphatically, that the flesh on the back of her arms would jiggle fiercely. She'd mutter indignations as she reached for her clipboard to write down the license number of the offending vehicle. Her fury, as most of the kids on the bus understood intuitively, was based more on the fact that the someone had dared to defy her authority. Of course, this was not something any of them could articulate. All Howie and the other kids on the bus knew, was that when Hazel told you to move back, you moved back.

Not wanting to push his luck, Howie moved on back to where his older brother, George, was sitting. George always saved a seat for Howie. Howie didn't know why, nor did he question it. It simply was. George sat next to the window in a blue Arctic parka. It was zipped all the way up — even the tunnel-like hood, which was trimmed with synthetic fur. What this meant, of course, was that George was exasperated with Howie. And Howie knew it because George once said to his younger brother, "Howie, I'm utterly exasperated with you," and then he proceeded to zip himself from Howie's sight. George had an impressive vocabulary for a sixth grader.

"I'm sorry I finished the Cap'n Crunch, George," Howie said. Howie was not, in fact, sorry that he finished the last of George's favorite cereal. But, in times of crisis, even seven-year-olds possess a keen sense of what's politically expedient. George unzipped his hood so that Howie could see him.

"Hey, butt breath, you lost your hat again." Howie knew George would notice immediately that he had lost his hat. George didn't miss much. "Boy, are you dumb."

Howie was too worried about what his mother was going to say to be bothered by George's insults. This was the third hat he'd lost in almost as many months. "Shit for brains, I swear! Where'dja lose it?"

"I don't know!" Howie was close to tears. "I checked the lost and found at school. I looked all over the playground. I even asked Hazel."

"You're hopeless, Howie," George said, frowning. "You're utterly hopeless."

"Mom's going to kill me, George."

"She's gonna kill you," he agreed. A wad of paper whizzed by his ear. "Idiots! Plebians! Look on the bright side, Howie. Here's a whole busload of people who are more stupid than you are."

Howie didn't bother responding. He

slumped in his seat, drew his knees up toward his chest, and placed them against the textured metal backing of the seat in front of his and George's. Someone had scrawled a big, red "Fuck You" near where his right knee rested.

Howie didn't know what this meant. Not exactly. But, he knew that by saying it to George he could make him very mad. So, it was Howie's not-so-secret weapon. He brandished it with glee when George got too obnoxious, which was often. George was always very critical of Howie.

On any given day, a conversation with George would reveal to Howie that he had big ears, that he was stupid, and that he'd never be as good a tetherball player as Jimmy Whitford. Under normal circumstances, Howie was more of a fighter — a spitfire his father called him. When Howie had taken enough verbal abuse from George, he'd blast him with a "fuck you" and rely on his superior footspeed to elude George's shockingly bony elbows and knuckles.

Of course, if George was giving Howie a hard time on the bus, Howie would wait until after they got off before he struck back with his one effective weapon. But, there would be none of that today. Fear can have a surprisingly calming effect on the disposition of the condemned. At least it appears so.

The truth is that the mind races so quickly it leaves the body behind in a vague and timeless fog. Howie's thoughts were full of disturbing images of his mother in varying degrees of anguish and rage.

"Don't your father and I work hard to make a nice life for you?" She said last time. "Don't we? Every weekend with the weddings and barmitzvahs. And then, at the studio till all hours putting the albums together, and making this one look not so fat, and making that one's wrinkles go away... all for you and George, so that you can have everything we never had. And you lose this, you lose that, you lose everything! How could you be so irresponsible Howard Alan Bloomberg? You give me gray hairs!"

Bus number 33 hit a big pothole, jerking Howie back to reality. The bus turned right on Swallow Boulevard and made its first step at Blackbird Road — only three steps from Howie and George's street. George was absorbed in a Judge Dread comic book. Judge Dread is a fearsome, yet judicious enforcer of law and order in a thriving eastern megalopolis of the not-too distant future.

Glad for something to focus on other than his own troubles, Howie looked at the brightly colored panels as George read intently, unbothered by the general ruckus on the bus. George felt Howie's gaze, turned to him, and said, "Judge Dread is the law, Howie."

Reflexively, without knowing *what* he was saying (in more ways than one) Howie replied, "Judge Dread's a fag."

Howie braced himself for a noogie, an elbow to the side of the arm, or a fist to the thigh; one simply did not slur Judge Dread in such a manner and hope to escape retribution! But, to Howie's suprise, George only yawned and said, "Maybe, Howie, maybe. But, he sure as hell doesn't have to go to bed without any supper because he lost his hat."

"'Course not. He'd shoot his mother dead with his laser blaster!"

"Damn straight!" Howie thought he saw George smile, faintly, but he never looked up from his comic book.

Just a few minutes later, Howie and George were walking toward their house on Mockingbird Heights, the straight, flat, and nearly treeless street on which they lived.

The Bloombergs were one of only a handful of home owners on the block who'd bothered to have trees planted when they'd landscaped. In the front yard, there was a maple and an elm. Their bare branches were silhouetted burgundy against the midafternoon sun. Yet, Howie couldn't appreciate the sight at the moment. He had to face Shirley Bloomberg with some bad news: lost, the third hat in almost as many months.

One house away! George finally closed his Judge Dread comic book as he and Howie turned up the driveway to the two-story Colonial.

"Howie, you stay out here and try not lose your brains while I tell mom that you're going to help me with my paper route." Howie nodded, but didn't say anything. And he didn't look up. He

knew he was only postponing the inevitable.

When George came out about a minute later, he carried with him two *Detroit News* shoulder bags and Jacob Bloomberg's red hunting hat. The only things Jacob Bloomberg ever shot were thousands of brides and grooms and teenage boys and girls — through the lens of his Rolleiflex. But, Jacob had a weakness for the L.L. Bean catalog. George chucked the hat at Howie. "In case your ears, which show that we might be distantly related to Prince Charles, get cold," he explained. "Let's load you up, Howie. You can do Egret." Howie followed George to where the papers were stacked against the side of the garage.

Soon, Howie was walking toward Swallow, straining against the weight of the papers. At Swallow, he turned left, and when he got to Egret, he turned left again. He walked along slowly, trying to think of nothing, but thinking of lots of things: how mad his mother was going to be; Jennifer Goodsmith hit him and how strange odors came out of her desk; how his father always insisted that he finish all his milk in the morning; how Mrs. Moscowitz always insisted that her paper placed under a corner of the mat on the porch; how Miss Rifkind shook Richard Gould by the shoulders and made him cry because he'd been mean to Sally Sherman; how crayons got messy when you pressed too hard . . . And then his bag was empty.

Howie stood at the Corner of Egret and Swallow. He stood very quietly. The sky was deep blue and nearly cloudless. The air smelled woody and fragrant with possibility. The earth was thawing. Much snow had melted, but scattered patches sparkled brilliantly in the afternoon sun. Actually, it was an iceball.

He took off his glove and cradled the iceball in his right hand, letting it numb his skin. Perhaps things wouldn't be so bad after all. Sure, she'd yell, but she couldn't yell forever, could she? He'd go upstairs and put his pajamas on, get into bed, and read his new Encyclopedia Brown Boy Detective book. Later, George might sneak him a few Kraft singles.

When the iceball got too cold to hold onto any longer, Howie chucked it at a stop sign. He hit the sign squarely and it resonated at a low frequency, like a gong. Howie put his glove back on and headed for home with the *Detroit News* bag flopping loosely at his side. He felt oddly peaceful.

When he got to the front porch, he saw a heavy paper cup of hot chocolate resting on one of its steps. It was from the 7-11 down at the other end of the street. Under the cup was a note:

No one should have to die on an empty stomach.

Your brother,
George

Chicken Abortions

Linda Werbner

"Did I ever tell you that when I was young, I thought that eggs were really chicken abortions, and I refused to eat them," Alana Bick said dreamily, a faint smile on her lips, as she gazed at her husband Ernie's vegetable omelette. His fork froze in midair.

"Thanks a lot, Alana. You just whet my appetite," he snarled, letting his fork clank down and bounce off the gilt-edged, porcelain plate and onto the floor, next to the heel of an older woman next to them. She jumped up with a little gasp and glanced quickly at both of them. When no one said anything, she ducked down and retrieved the greasy fork. Alana watched the matronly woman daub the point of her napkin with her tongue, catlike, and bitterly swipe the greasy smudge off her patent leather pumps.

Prior to this disturbance, she had been studying the plastic menu and puffing serenely on a silver cigarette ring that she wore on her forefinger. Alana made a mental note to ask the woman where she got such a thing. She must be from the city. I wonder if she's also going to see the Reverend Thurlow Weed perform at the Heritage Jamboree. This holy blow-out promises to be something — something to tell my grandchildren about, she smiled. Surely, the good Reverend Weed will be able to convince God that I deserve children.

For the past three weeks, Alana's old transistor on the kitchen table buzzed of nothing else. There will be more spectacles, thrills, and excitement at the 15th annual Heritage Jamboree than ten big tops. "Than ten big tops," she whispered to herself, chin in hand, as she watched her husband's ruddy ears wriggle and twitch as he chewed. Works like a machine, don't it, she smiled to herself.

A fly buzzed anxiously over the greasy mound of scrambled eggs. In a blizzard of a second, it was no more than leaden paste between Ernie's flat, brown thumb and forefinger. He deftly flicked the tiny carcass onto the carpet. "What you always grinning to yourself about?" Ernie said absently, as if he didn't really expect an answer, he just wanted to let her know he was aware.

Reverend Weed was the Bick's favorite voice on Saturday mornings. His two-hour show was broadcast live from his Tiltonville parish at Heritage Stadium in the city. While Alana manned the frying pan where the eggs and steak sizzled and sputtered in a dull, greasy foam, Ernie, eyes squinting thoughtfully behind thick, distorted lenses, sipped milky coffee, making agreeing grunts and sighs with each sylvan crescendo and decrescendo. The rushing, urgent hiss of the frying pan, the shimmering, sporadic applause from the Reverend Weed's fond audience, and Ernie's soft agreeing grunts, created a domestic rhythm that brought tears of adoration and swooning affection to Alana's eyes. Weed had a golden speaking voice, which he modulated and rolled with all the finesse of the Memphis symphony orchestra. "Turn t'up, turn t'up, Al," he'd say anxiously, his head thrust forward, back arched, butt half off his seat.

Weed's sermons always inspired thoughtful debate between the couple. On Friday, the man, the voice, in the flesh, would be there to lay hands on his audience. Those soft, electric, holy hands. She cuddled her chin in her neck just imagining how his touch would feel on her cheek. I'll wear my blue traveling suit and have my hair all pinned up nice, a few tendrils loose in back. Have to remember to pluck my eyebrows, they're almost connecting again.

On Friday, the Reverend Thurlow Weed, with the power invested in him from the mighty Lord, would cure her of her female problems and Ernie of his gall bladder pain. Then they could be happy. No more doctor's bills, waiting rooms, grim prog-

noses, bitter tonics and pills to take at odd hours of the night. No more hoping.

"Sorry, ma'am, that was an accident," Ernie tried to explain to the woman, who had the most hearbreakingly hunted look on her face. "You see, my wife here," he stared hard at her, "just told me that eggs are chicken abortions and you can bet that made me really hungry!"

The woman squeezed out a lemony smile and nodded her head in some kind of agreement. The cigarette ring was now off her finger and lying on top of a shiny new box of low-tar Eve's.

"And I used to think marshmallows grew on trees and skin grafts were melted warts," she continued, amusing herself.

"Yeah, well you were a naive kid," said Ernie, digging in again. "The thought — marshmallows as an organic fruit," Ernie laughed to himself, emptying a chunk of chive-speckled egg into his mouth.

Alana belched loudly, touching a plump forefinger to her lips delicately, shrugging her shoulders. The woman next to them shifted in her seat and blinked uncomfortably several times at Alana.

"That's disgusting," Ernie exclaimed, letting his fork clank down again, only this time the clank was louder because there was hardly any egg to break the fall. "Ladies burping in public. Didn't your mother ever teach you any manners, Al? Shit, you sound like a bullfrog during mating season. Where's your class, huh?" he said looking down at her white, nervous hands busily twisting the ends of a red napkin under her plate.

A ray of late morning sunlight poured in through the plate glass window and narrowed to a spotlight on Alana's thick upper arms. For a moment he could almost see the subtle shifting of bone and muscle underneath her flesh.

"Excuse me," she mumbled. "My food just came up to say hello," giggling, she looked into his face for recognition.

Her giggling reminded him of the faint clink the thinly-blown glass icicles on their tree had made whenever someone opened or closed the door.

They had taken down their tree last Saturday, almost six weeks after Christmas. She had begged him, prodded him to wait "just one more week" every time he began circling the tree like a shark. Before he left for work each day, he'd absentmindedly survey the tree's latest decay, inspecting its withered, drooping branches stripped of candy canes thanks to their neighbor's children, an ornament here, a string of tinsel there, a legless gingerbread man peering mystically from the brittle green depths.

The angel was a conical, cardboard cut-out of the Reverend Weed, his navy-suited arms outstretched in a wide, heavenly embrace, eyes shut in glorious ecstasy, and his mouth slightly open. He was a gift they received from the Weed Ministries in Dallas after pledging $15 during the annual phon-a-thon. For $25 more, the operator had told Alana, they would receive a Weed salt and pepper shaker set and an autographed, framed color photo of him. But $15 was all they could afford then. They had spent so much on decorating the baby's room, buying a crib, a stroller, toys, and diapers, that they had trouble making that month's rent. Ernie had to ask his younger brother, Lymon, a loud, fat little man with a bitter sense of humor, for a $200 loan. Lymon agreed only after Ernie promised to name the baby, if it was a boy, after him, or at least his middle name.

Afterwards, when they tried to return all the baby merchandise, none of the stores would give them a refund. "We have a three-week refund policy, ma'am, sorry. Perhaps you can donate this stuff to a needy young family who could use it."

He remembered how the whole house smelt like pine, how pine needles fell like soft rain at the slightest brush of a leg or a shoulder. But it was their first Christmas tree. A Canadian blue pine that they paid $8.50 for in the Childworld parking lot, which sold daffodils and lilies in the spring, pumpkins, cider, and warty gourds in the fall, and inflatable beach balls in July.

The goddamn thing was so wide that it took up a whole corner of the living room in their modest-sized apartment. And if you weren't careful, as Ernie discovered, you'd get whipped in the face by a spiky branch. Practically every night that month, after supper, as he watched a basketball game or read the paper, she would stand behind him

and pluck tinsel off of his sweater.

But that was some tree, Ernie thought, remembering how light it had seemed as he gathered it into his arms and lugged it down two flights of stairs, dropping it on the muddy curb to be collected by the trashmen the next day, like it should have been weeks ago.

"Hey, how come you're not eating anything," he said in a soft, curious voice. "A woman doesn't live by coffee alone. Besides, we won't be stopping again for another three or four hours, so get all your eating and peeing done here."

She looked down and said stiffly,"I'm not hungry. I had a baked potato and some spinach before I left. If I were hungry, I'd eat. There'll be plenty of food at the Jamboree."

"Yeah," he said, unintentionally eyeing her puffy forearms and the pillowy, bulging creases visible through her thin blue teeshirt.

With suprise and a tinge of sorrow, he noted how her flesh rolled and spilled over the elastic band of her bra. He remembered how firm and tanned those arms had been the summer before. How they slithered around his waist like cool snakes when they were walking together. They were always encircled with a silver bangle or two that pinged lightly, like windchimes in a light breeze, when she moved her arm even the slightest bit. He realized how much he missed that sound. How much of an absent comfort it had always been. He sipped his coffee.

"Anything wrong?" she said sharply. "I mean, do I have three heads or something? Have I grown a mustache? Are there spots on my body?" she said, holding out her arms to examine them.

"Ok, Ok, Al, cool it, will ya?" he pleaded.

"It's natural, you know, to gain weight when you have...one," the hardness lifting from her voice. She looked at him for his reaction, hoping for the same expression to meet her eyes. The expression that she knew so well, the arched, almost suprised brow, the heavy-lidded green eyes reduced to magnified points behind his thick glasses, the receding chin camouflaged by the bristly black, sickle-shaped beard, and his thin, yellow lips, almost an afterthought in the unusual shape of his face.

"I was eating for two, you know that. It ain't my fault. I'll join a health spa when we get back, start walking more, you know?" she offered. "I'll fit that ring back on my finger in no time," she squeezed her hand into a round, knuckly fist, "right now I'm all bloated, I can't even get it on my pinky finger."

He felt heavy and rotten inside. He had not expected to upset this well of guilt and sadness, and her pitiful justifications only made him feel worse. "No, hon, God. Really, you look fine, really," he whispered earnestly, his warm, dry palm caressing her arm. She felt her hand twitch with suprise at his touch.

"I brought my blue traveling suit with me, Ern. I can still fit into it," she smiled weakly. She knew he liked the way the suit fit her, hugging her hips, emphasizing the voluptuous sloping line from her behind to her legs. At least her legs weren't logs yet.

The woman next to them glanced over discreetly. After every bite of her turkey club, Alana had noticed how she nervously daubed the corners of her mouth as she chewed. It was a slow, deliberate sort of chewing. Her eyes bugged and her cheeks ballooned with food, but her lips stayed tightly pursed. She looked around after each swallow to see if anyone had been watching her. She was painful to watch.

"You know, another thing I always wondered about when I was younger was how come you never saw cats on the beach," said Alana, twirling a strand of her short, russet hair between her fingers. "I mean, you see dogs and birds and sometimes horses on the beach, but cats — never," she said distantly.

Ernie stared at her blankly for a moment, then went back to his egg. He winced. A needle of hot pain snuggled his gut for a moment. God, not now, with so many miles left to drive, he thought. Reverend Weed, help us, help us, he prayed. The pills, the tonics don't work. Only the Lord and you can give us the soothing medicine.

Alana started, her eyes flickered to life with awareness and alarm. "Aw, honey," she cried helplessly.

He shook his head and blinked quickly.

"Nothing," he said exhaling, nervously poking the soft yellow mound of eggs. False alarm. "Can't wait 'til Friday," he said with heavy relief.

Alana began again, somewhat cautiously. "Sure, they don't like to swim but they could hide in the weeds, nap on the blankets and all, I don't know, " she shrugged.

"Well," said Ernie, "maybe they were there all along or sometimes, but they were hiding in the weeds, looking for a mouse."

Alana looked up, suprised, as he offered his hypothesis. It was so rare that he ever replied or gave her questions and scenes anything more than a tired shrug or a baleful squint.

"Or maybe cats just don't live near the beach or their owners don't bring them there," she encouraged. "But it seems like the perfect place for a cat, you know? It's like a giant litter box and there's fish everywhere. Cats loooove fish, they can smell it an hour away."

"But then cats have all that fur," Ernie counterpointed. "I read somewhere that they really sweat through their paws. Plus, they love to hide from people. They need a couch or a chair to squat under and watch everything from a distance."

"Like your mother," she said.

"Yours!" he laughed, squeezing her hand.

"Cats are like household air traffic controllers without tongues," she said, proud of the profound image that she created.

"A cat is a sphinx without a secret," he topped.

Alana felt light and happy and carefree all of the sudden. She loved to talk. She loved to talk to Ernie. But lately, they spent less time speculating about odd things; a habit that Alana simply craved. She knew that he probably thought that she was just being frisky or car anxious after so many mute miles of nothing but blue highways, billboards, and souvenir shops, and Weed this, and Weed that, but she really did wonder about such things. She was curious and when he got crabby at her for asking, she felt a heavy swing in the pit of her stomach, a vague aching disappointment that worried her.

"What do they dream about? God, that's all most of them do is sleep. I wonder," she said. "Think they dream about tender young canaries, their owner's lap, Nine Lives Liver Buffet, cat fucking—do you think they feel any pleasure?" Ernie shrugged and raised his eyebrows that shrouded his buggy pale green eyes. I lost him again, she thought. If only I had mental telepathy with him, then we wouldn't end up driving each other crazy with words all the time.

But some words were so nice. Reverend Weed's words always made her feel so confident, so reassured, so infinite. Aw, what did he say all the time? Yeah, "Happiness is having a hand to hold, finding a heart to heal, leaning into tomorrow with love!" I'm leaning into tommorrow with hope and faith. What are you leaning into tommorrow with, Ern?

"You know what cracks me up is when you're driving down the highway on a nice sunny day and you see this dog face sticking out of some guy's car," she laughed. "Its ears flapping in the wind, all serious and pointy. Dogs are serious."

"I've always been a cat person," Ernie said solemnly, licking his fingers.

The woman with the cigarette ring was chewing quickly now, staring bug-eyed at Ernie and Alana, watching each exchange like it was a tennis match.

Alana began ripping open packet after packet of Sweet n' Low, molding neat little white lines. He smiled at her concentration. She was quite a girl, he thought.

The waitress came by with a pot of coffee and filled their cups without asking if they wanted anymore. Alana and Ernie were silent as they watched the black liquid cord flow from the metal nozzle and into each cup. Alana's jaw was still, Ernie's ears were still. It had a secretive intimacy, this moment, and both wondered if the other detected it. The steam rose up eerily from their now-full cups and fogged Ernie's glasses. The thick lenses were dusted with whitish flakes. Have to ask Reverend Weed to do something about Ernie's psoriasis, too, she remembered.

Alana had a momentary glimpse of the pleasure the Queen of England must feel. It was nice to be served. After the waitress poured their coffee, she went to the matronly woman to fill her

cup, also. Alana watched as the woman whisked a rigid hand over the mouth of her cup and nod ever so slightly when the pot was offered. She sure knows what she wants, that woman, Alana stared wistfully.

"Do you know if the Queen of England has a last name? You never hear it. It's always Queen this or Queen that, never Queen Victoria Higgins or Princess Stephanie Bick," Alana sighed. Ernie shrugged and picked some chive out of his teeth.

"If we ever run out of money on the road, I'll bet I could sell a bagful of this to some dumb junior high kids," she mused, her finger tracing her initials in the powdery white trenches.

"That would be nasty," he said.

"Ha, I remember my brother Rudy told me he once sold some front row tickets to a Jimi Hendrix concert to these kids. They didn't know that he had already been dead for three years," Alana said stretching up from her minute pile.

"How did he do that?" said Ernie, horrified. Alana's tales of her brothers and sisters never failed to shock and amaze him, if nothing but their sheer nasty cleverness. They were all wild and dangerous, all six of the Higgins. Two brothers were already serving time in the state penitentiary for armed robbery. The girls were devils, too. All lookers, but they only went with wild, tough boys who would treat them wrong and leave them periodically. Alana has some devil blood, too, he acknowledged.

"They were movie tickets from the Medway Cinema where his girlfriend worked. Remember Sherry? The one who worked in the concession stand. She was sweet. She always nicked a couple of boxes of Goobers for me cause she knew I loved them."

"Gosh, that's pretty nasty," Ernie said to himself.

"Aw c'mon, Ernie, those kids were dumb enough to buy them and besides, if they were real Hendrix fans they would have known that the guy was dead. Chickenshits," she sighed.

"I'm just saying that if I were—"

"Yeah," she sighed impatiently, "if you were them you'd have been chickenshitted too, right?" she said dipping her head back and forth as if it were something that she had heard a million times already.

"Jesus, Alana, you never let me finish a goddamned sentence," he spat, his eyes flashing. "You know it makes me stutter when you do that, I lose my train of thought. You always think you know me better than I do. Well, it p-pisses me off," he said, slamming his fist on the red gingham tablecloth. The sudden force made his fork jump on the empty plate noisily.

Having had enough, the woman next to them rose quickly, as if she had been insulted, tucked a five dollar bill between the salt and pepper shakers and marched out. Once, at the door, she turned around for a second and gave the couple what Alana feared was the evil eye.

"I know Hendrix is dead, I know that, Alana," Ernie whined. "I have e-ev-every single, every single bootleg of his on t-tatape. He died in 1971 of a d-da-drug overdose. They found him in his hotel room. He choked on his own va-va-vomit," Ernie recited. As he spoke these last words, his voice rose in volume. They were dramatic words and he liked repeating them.

"And you complain about chicken abortions?" Alana sniffed. "Hey, Ern, I think I finally figured it out why you don't see cats on the beach. 'Cause the dogs are always there. It's so obvious."

"How did we ever get into this?" he cried, as his eyes scanned the room. He noticed that everywhere he looked, the door, the windows, the counters, were decorated with chubby pink naked cupids and red cardboard hearts with "Be Mine!" and "Always" printed in gold birthday cake script. Taped to the cash register, above the "Thanks, Come Again!" placard, was an 8x11 color photo of the Reverend Weed. The color was so intense that his skin looked pale orange and his lips were almost violet, his dusty blue eyes gave off an icy sheen. In the photo, he was looking solemnly, confidently into the distance, eyes narrowed and crinkly, but not shifty-looking. Oh, he was a handsome devil.

"How?" she said cooly, "well, I asked you a question and you answered and then I responded to your answer and vice versa. It's called a conversation, remember, Ernie?"

"That's *not* a conversation," he said in

careful, measured tones. "A conversation is an intelligent exchange of thoughts. Not this babble about marshmallows on trees and cats on beaches."

"Well, at least I *try*, at least I don't sit back and turn up my nose at everything that comes my way." She paused for a moment, then sighed heavily. "I just don't know how to talk to you anymore, Ernie. Honest to God, I just don't," she whispered to herself. He watched her brush the dusty white rows of saccharin off the table in one quick chop. Both watched as the white cloud of sweetness glittered for a moment as if suspended in midair, and then floated down onto the red brick carpet.

Then she saw how helpless they really were. Reverend Weed, with all his prayers and blessings, could fix a gall bladder, maybe even mend my uterus, but can he make real happiness? Can he mend my heart after this pain, this loss. Oh, I'll never forget it, never, for as long as I live and Ernie don't realize that. *Bye, bye, little tiny girl, bye, bye....*

He raised his eyes slowly from the floor, to her full coffee cup with its faint, half-moon of organdy lipstick on the rim, up the length of her freckled, pinkish arms crossed in front of her. His eyes rested on the blue teeshirt with a pack of Virginia Slims peaking out of the breast pocket, her heavy chest which grew into a long, suprisingly bony neck, a neck that wore a single thin silver chain with a small gold cross that caught the light like burnished foil. He looked at the face with its downturned mouth and thick, dark eyebrows that stretched uninterrupted over the bridge of her nose. Eyelashes that fluttered now like troubled moist wings — Were those tears? What is she thinking about now? — he knew that if he told her this, she would love him again. She loved poetic descriptions, even the sappy, pseudopoetic prattle that he sprouted every now and then. I wonder what they do with used Christmas trees, he wondered, suprised.

"We can try again, Alana," he called after her retreating figure as it disappeared in darkness and distance. The door to the restaurant slammed behind her, the bells tinkled mockingly, and the glass rattled in its pane.



The Tao of Poo

In
silence

In expectation
unfulfilled

In embarrassing flashes
of insight

In the solace
of high fiber

In Ex-Lax
Citracel or Metamucil

While reading a magazine
or toothpaste tube

I pre-op laxatives
a gallon of Go-Lyte-Ly

In a Fleet
enema

Maybe a flexible
sigmoidoscopy,
colonoscopy,
If need be
in a colostomy

before bed
in the morning
before meals
after lunch
before sex
or after
prior to Third Grade
Field Trips
at noon
when mother told you
any time but
when you have to

Rice cakes, prune juice
popcorn, apples
meditation, tofu
stress reduction, dried fruit
a life long struggle
to continue to poo.

— Peter Harvey

What Happened To The Laughter ?

Peter T. Kidwell

"Transformers, more than meets the eye." I think that one line from the show/product says a lot about the state of Saturday morning cartoons. What networks are passing off under the guise of entertainment for children is something parents need to pay a lot more attention to. By these shows being more than what "meets the eye," product manufacturers are able to get into our children's minds and transform them into little consumers who cannot be expected to survive without their products. Networks should not be allowed to show these sexist, violent, and blatantly commercial shows that they call cartoons.

I wonder if it all started with the secret agent ring inside the box of corn flakes? It all seemed quite innocent at the time; I mean, the kid got the ring and the parents got the corn flakes. Then, the producers started to think, "We could probably get away without giving anything to the parents." Then, Wham! Pow! Along come the sugar-coated cereals.

I'll admit it, they had me in their power when I was a kid. I still remember the mornings spent with Quisp and Quake, Captain Crunch, and that Lucky Charms guy, but I also remember that Saturday morning television was still sacred. Bugs Bunny never tried to sell me a transforming carrot, and as much as the logo was emblazoned on every invention of the Coyote's, I still to this day have yet to buy anything marked "Acme." Those were the days of Johnny Quest, George of the Jungle, Bullwinkle J. Moose, and Super Chicken.

Not any more! Now, I would be hard-pressed to find a show that was not backed up by a product. My Little Pony, Teddy Ruxpin, Rainbow Bright, and those blue creatures from hell — the Smurfs — all have games, dolls, bedsheets, breakfast cereals, and any other marketing ploy that can be thought of, that the producers are all trying to sell to our children.

It has become a four-hour commercial on Saturday mornings. From about 7 a.m., when the kids stumble bleary-eyed to the TV, until 11 a.m., when their parents finally pull them away. It never stops. It's hard to tell whether you are watching the show, the commercial for the show, or the commercial for the show's product. This is not entertainment; this is simply a way to numb their little minds into buying, or getting "Mommy or Daddy" to buy whatever they see on TV. "I mean, come on, Mom and Dad, you want your child to grow up normal, don't you? Well, then buy them our product or your child will never be able to keep up with the 'Johnny Joneses of the world."

There will still be parents that believe that these shows are all right, that they are entertaining. They will point the finger of responsibility as to whether or not the children play with those particular toys, at the parent. This is fine if the parent is responsible. But, more often than not, they are going to be very happy just to plop those little rug rats down in front of the tube for a few hours of peace and quiet for themselves.

The blatant commercialization of these shows is not the only problem, though. These shows also have underlying themes of sexism. There are specific "boy" cartoons and "girl" cartoons. My Little Pony, Care Bears, and Rainbow Bright, all try to deal with positive themes, but are presented in such a way that society often perceives that they are for girls only. When the kids are very young, parents will let both boys and girls watch these shows. Then, at some unknown point, things change; the parent decides that it would "not be right" for their son to want to play "Ponies," as my nieces call it. This reaction will have a snowball effect, too.

The parents don't let their boys watch the shows, then, the networks pick up on this trend, and they target the shows more at the girls. The end result of this is that even the parents who did allow their son to watch these shows that dealt with things like trust, friendship, and happiness, change their minds, too.

So, where do the boys go? Out where every real man should — to defend the universe. Are girls allowed? I've yet to see a girl "Transformer." All

that these shows are doing is to further the gap between the sexes at a frighteningly early age. How can society be expected to change this behavior when it is incorporated at such a formidable age? Re-educating the masses is hard enough; it would be nice if we could save the children.

Then there is the violence. Sure, we had violence in our cartoons as kids. The Coyote always fell off the cliff and Popeye always got clobbered by Brutus, but they always survived. Instead of them just shaking it off, current cartoons show the enemy ship being blown apart. The argument the other side always brings up is that you don't see the individual get hurt. Great, let's make killing an even more impersonal act. Let's make it so that as long as we don't see who we kill with our missile, it's OK. All of this desensitizing will only help to bring us closer to war in the real world.

In these cartoons, as long as the side of good can triumph over evil, any cost is permissible. The only problem with that is that nobody on the good side ever gets hurt. And these shows also teach our children that a military settlement with the "Evil Empire" is the only possible solution. Doesn't that sound frighteningly like something Reagan said? Are we allowing our children to be taught that this type of thinking is OK?

So, what happened to the laughter? Saturday mornings used to be a time for fun, silliness, and entertainment. Instead, now it is a time for mixed messages, confusing role models, feelings of inferiority, violence, sexism, and programming. How can we hope to have our children grow up as rational, thinking beings if we allow their minds to be scrambled?

I think it is time in this world to go back to a simpler pace, time to allow children to have some fun and let them be kids again. If we must give them shows with a message, let it be that men and women are equal, that peace is not attainable with laser beams, and that the person we are is not judged by who has the most stuff.





Elizabeth A. Lennon



Gerry J. Waggett



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The Bible as Influence: Style and Character in *Song of Solomon* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Wade Rowland

The Bible is the handbook of Christianity. Christianity is the foundation of western moral belief. The stories in the Bible have been interpreted to dictate behavior in Europe and the Americas for hundreds of years: the Pilgrims came to North America to establish a religion-based community; Spaniards imposed Catholicism on the natives when they invaded South America; the European monarches and emperors were believed to be appointed by Divine powers; and United States currency proclaims, "In God We Trust."

The Bible's influence is profound in our political, social, and cultural life. It follows that western literature would reflect the Bible's sway. Indeed, it has. Many novelists have obviously used the Scriptures as a basis for their novels. An excellent example is John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, whose plot recalls the Book of Genesis and whose lesson is based on Christian morals.

Although many authors borrow heavily from the Bible, few are able to capture the style of the Bible and treat its characters quite like Toni Morrison in *Song of Solomon* and Gabriel García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. My intention in this essay is to define this Biblical style and its uses in these two novels, and to explore the characters these two writers have borrowed from the Bible and how they are used.

In the Bible, miracles are commonplace. In it, reality includes giants and angels. Walking sticks turn into serpents and water can be transformed into blood. It is a story of myth and magic that is construed by the people in the Bible as reality. This is the language and style that has been captured by Sr. García Márquez and Ms. Morrison. They have continued the literary tradition of the Bible with what has been dubbed "magic realism". From *Paradoxical Resolutions:*

"Magic realism is not a specific aesthetic theory, but a style. . . . The striking images serve realistic, as well as symboliic purposes. ...[the magic realist] balances dream-like and realistic imagery. Characters see the physical world as a dream, only to find the dream elements confronting them in concrete forms. Magic colors reality. " [Werner 89].

Thus, it is in the worlds created for *Song of Solomon* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The people are mystified by strange events — a priest who can levitate by drinking hot chocolate is *not* to be simply shrugged at (*Solitude* 85-86) —but these phenomena are accepted as a part of, and therefore, equal to the more mundane events. The magic realism in these two novels, as in the Bible, serves to justify the inexplicable and lend power to significant events.

The "realistic purpose" of magic realism is to create a world in which the mundane and the magical have an equal ability to make things happen. In this way, an author can justify an event that cannot be explained factually, by attributing that event to an incomprehensible power. In Genesis, the phenomena of the creation of night and day are justified by attributing it to God.

"Then God said, 'Let there be light.' And light appeared. And God was pleased with it, and divided the light from the darkness. So he let it shine for awhile, and then there was darkness again. He called the light 'daytime' and the darkness 'nighttime.' Together they formed the first day "[Genesis 1:3,4,5].

What better way to explain that awesome event than to attribute it to the unfathomable God. The magical presence — God — works through a mysterious medium, in this case Himself, to make something happen that could not be explained by the authors of the Bible in the real world. Likewise, Sr. García Márquez and Ms. Morrison exploit this freedom in the worlds they have created. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Sr. García Márquez

accounts for the uncanny preservation of the room that contains parchments written by Melquíades, the gypsy. Melquíades instructs the Buendías to burn mercury in the room for three days after his death (75). When the room is opened a century later:

"In the background were the shelves with the shredded books, the rolls of parchment, and the clean and orderly worktable with the ink still fresh in the inkwells. There was the same pureness in the air, the same clarity, the same respite from dust and destruction "[289].

The fragile parchments, that contain the prophesy of the Buendía family, had to survive for one hundred years for the story to work, so, Sr. García Márquez employed the magical Melquíades to use the unlikely mercury formula as a medium to create a force field around the precious documents.

Ms. Morrison's magical presence is embodied in the character, Pilate Dead. Pilate is used to initiate the conception of the necessary male heir to the Dead family's heritage of flying. Pilate gives her sister-in-law, Ruth, an aphrodisiac to mix into her husband's food. Macon Dead Sr. had not slept with, nor was he going to sleep with Ruth since he saw her in what he thought was a "compromising position" with her dead father. Pilate solves the problem with magic. *"[Pilate] gave me funny things to do. And some greenish-gray grassy-looking stuff to put in his food. . . . Macon came to me for four days. He even came home from his office in the middle of the day to be with me. He looked puzzled, but he came. . . . And two months later I was pregnant"* [*Song* 125].

With Toni Morrison as guide, the reader enters a mythical world where magic potions are administered by mysterious women who possess the power to make things happen.

The "symbolic purpose" of magic realism is emphasis. By adding a sprinkle of the supernatural, an author can make a mundane event exciting, or ensure that a significant event gets the attention it deserves. Take, for example, the parting of the Red Sea in the Bible. If the story were told as, I suspect, it actually happened, it would not carry the same weight that it does in its Biblical form. The importance of the Jew's escape from Egypt needs more emphasis than the chronicled account one may find in a history book. "The children of Israel were almost trapped by Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. However, they maintained their courage and did not surrender, but instead made a narrow escape." Instead, we are treated with a story of a people who were faced with impossible odds. Rather than losing faith in the Higher Power, who had promised to deliver them from the land of their enslavement, they humbly asked his help. He, in turn, carves a dry path through the center of the Red Sea and then annihilates the entire Egyptian army by dumping the sea on them when they try to follow (Exodus 14:15-31). The Biblical version serves the reader a story with a lesson in faith and a powerful rendition of an important historical event poignantly evoked by the symbol of the parted sea to represent the promise of the delivery from bondage.

Similarly, Sr. García Márquez and Ms. Morrison apply magic realism to create symbols to distinguish their characters and events. Pilate Dead, from *Song of Solomon*, is an independent woman. She is a very caring woman, she loves people, but she does not *need* anyone or anything. Everything about her sets her apart from most people in the world. She was born without the help of her mother, who died while bearing her. She is a bootlegger who does not drink. She is a single mother, who rejected a potentially good husband because she wanted to roam. She lives in a house that has no luxuries, but where a visitor is made comfortable.

But, Ms. Morrison does not settle for these mundane details alone. She wants Pilate to be extraordinary. Pilate was born without a navel. Her smooth belly sets her apart from everybody, not just from the majority. Her lack of an umbilical connection symbolizes her lack of dependence on anybody, not even her mother while Pilate was in the womb. Ms. Morrison could have relied on Pilate's symbolic lack of umbilical connection to the community: water lines, gas lines, and electricity. Instead, she chooses to make the point unavoidable to the reader.

Sr. García Márquez uses magic realism to symbolize the bondage of knowledge. He not only

borrows the style of the Bible, but also the symbol itself. José Arcadio Buendía, the patriarch of the family, is struck with an insatiable desire for knowledge. He believes that knowledge is the key to progress (money) and that progress is the key to happiness. So, when Melquíades' gypsy band begins to visit Macondo, Sr. Buendía's village, he neglects his duties as a father and unofficial mayor of Macondo and buys each of their "miraculous" inventions, proving himself to be a tireless experimenter.

He tries to extract gold from the ground with magnets (*Solitude* 11-12). He transforms a magnifying glass into a weapon (12-13). He masters navigation to such a degree that "he conceived a notion of space which enabled him to navigate across unknown seas, to visit uninhabited territories, and to establish relations with splendid beings without having to leave his study" (14). He tries to double the quantity of gold, using an alchemy lab (16). Finally, after many journeys into the fields of knowledge he enters a realm where time is meaningless. It is always March and it is always Monday. In exasperation José Arcadio Buendía goes mad, begins to pulverize his house, and has to be carried to the courtyard and tied to a chestnut tree: the tree of knowledge.

His experiments are characterized by the fact that: one, they are always unsuccessful; two, their pursuit leads him away from the happiness he had when he first founded the village and began to raise his family; and three, they are always for selfish or destructive ends. When he reaches the pinnacle of learning and goes insane, his confinement symbolizes his life-long bondage to the futile search for happiness through knowledge.

Magic realism is made believable by means of the balance between magic and reality. Ms. Morrison and Sr. García Márquez treat both the mundane and the fantastic equally, which makes their occurrence equally natural. The apotheosis of this balance is the mysterious murder of José Arcadio, José Arcadio Buendía's son.

"...a pistol shot echoed through the house. A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendía house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the other living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta's chair as she gave an arithmetic lesson to Aureliano José, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread.
'Holy mother of God!' Ursula shouted" [GM 129-130]

In his book, *Gabriel García Márquez*, George R. McMurray addresses this incident. "José Arcadio's death is utterly absurd, but it is made almost believable by the meticulous stylistic precision, down-to-earth language, and numerous everyday details surrounding the occurrence" (89). In this manner, Ms. Morrison and Sr. García Márquez are able to use the tool of magic realism.

The themes of their stories are equally historical and mythical. He employs Columbian history and she uses Afro-American history. The events in the novels are equally magical and ordinary. The trail of blood can travel across town, but the woman it finds has to bake the bread, Ursula can not conjure it.

The characters are both powerful and vulnerable. Melquíades is undoubtedly a sorcerer, but his power can do nothing for his rheumatism, toothlessness and poverty, and while Pilate has the ability to speak to the dead, she misinterprets what they say. All of this is modeled directly from the Bible. But, magic realism is not the only loan the two authors have made from the Scriptures. Sr. García Márquez and Ms. Morrison utilize more concrete aspects of the Bible in their work. The best example of this is character.

Both novels are populated with characters or composites of characters lifted directly from the Bible. However, Ms. Morrison and Sr. García Márquez differ in the way they use these characters. While he remains fairly faithful to the personalities and characteristics of the Biblical figures,

Ms. Morrison's characters are in direct opposition to the originals. In an interview with Peter H. Stone, Sr. García Márquez states, "In every novel, the character is a collage: a collage of different characters that you've known, or heard about or read about" (*Writers* 327).

The characters that are most heavily influenced from the Scriptures are the seventeen illegitimate sons of Coronel Aureliano Buendía. The Colonel conceived these sons during the span of his thirty-two unsuccessful campaigns against the Conservative government during which he attained a reputation as a powerful and cunning warrior. The seventeen mothers of his bastard sons were sent to his tent at night in hope that he would breed powerful and cunning men. The seventeen resulting sons, all of whom are named Aureliano, are a montage of many characters from the Bible.

The first connection to the Bible comes when the Aurelianos come together in Macondo around Ash Wednesday and at the urging of Amaranta Buendía, they accompany her to church, where they are daubed with ashes. But, the ashes will not wash off from the seventeen mens' foreheads. (*Solitude* 204-205). Eventually, this spells their doom, for one by one the Aurelianos are killed by unnamed assassins who pierce the cross of ashes by various devilish means (225).

The Aurelianos' marked foreheads come up repeatedly in Scripture. First, in Genesis, Cain is afraid that someone may kill him to revenge the death of Abel. "The Lord put an identifying mark on Cain as a warning not to kill him" (4:15). Similarly, Ursula comments to the Aurelianos when it is discovered that the ashes, put there by the church or God, will not wash off, "It's better that way From now on, everyone will know who you are" (*Solitude* 205). However, these marks that start out as a sign of power and protection passed down from their father, turn into a curse.

In the book of Revelations, John the seer states, "(The Devil, during his reign on Earth) required everyone . . . to be tattooed with a certain mark on the right hand or on the forehead" (7:16). Then, when God comes down to rescue the Earth, an angel warns:

"Anyone worshiping the creature from the sea and his statue and accepting his mark on the forehead or the hand, must drink the wine of the anger of God; it is poured out undiluted into God's cup of wrath. And they will be tormented with fire and burning sulphur" [14:9-10].

It must have been a bad vintage, for the fire and sulphur translated itself into ice picks and Mauser cartridges for the seventeen Aurelianos soon after the Colonel defied God, this time cast as the greedy gringo banana company, by saying, "One of these days . . . I'm going to arm my boys so we can get rid of these shitty gringos!" (*Solitude* 224). Sr. García Márquez even lifts a Biblical reference, God's promise of revenge to Cain if anyone should kill him, to choose the number of boys the Colonel should have. "The Lord replied, 'They won't kill you, for I will give seven times your punishment to anyone who does.'" (Genesis 4:15). And, later on in the chapter, Cain's great-great-great grandson, Lamech, makes this statement:

"I have killed a youth who attacked and wounded me. If anyone who kills Cain will be punished seven times, anyone taking revenge against me for killing that youth should be punished seventy-seven times! "(4:23-24).

So, Sr. García Márquez strikes a compromise. If a great-great-great grandson were revenged seventy-seven times, and the the original killer was revenged seven times, his sons would be revenged seventeen times. This intricate weaving of traits, formed a group of characters that served as a measure of Colonel Aureliano Buendía's power. At first, to be marked as his son was a protection, a sign of prestige, but when he had retired and surrendered to begin a life of solitude, a mere threat to the power of the banana company brought the companies revenge. The Bible proved to be fertile ground for the author.

Ms. Morrison's treatment of Biblical characters is particularly intriguing because they are so markedly contrary to the original models. On the surface, she is mocking the tradition of randomly choosing, from the Bible, something as important as a name. But, it is more than that. She is openly rebelling against the Euro-American Christian influence, and she does this by plucking Biblical

characters out of their context and leaving them at the mercy of the Afro-American reality. Mr. Werner states:

"A deeper understanding of the process which led to the naming of Pilate, First Corinthians, Magdalina, Hagar, and Reba reveals that the names subvert rather than support the Christian myth" [Werner 90].

Cynthia Dubin Edelberg, in *American Literature*, gives a powerful dissertation on this subject.

"Pilate, the natural healer, the embodiment of love and generosity, turns the bitter joke back on itself. . . . The Biblical Rebecca is the sought after bride for Isaac. She comes to the marriage with honor and riches. Her life is abundant; her son Jacob prospers. Pilates daughter Reba, short for Rebecca, lives husbandless, from `orgasm to orgasm`, and survives in meager fashion unable to fight off an angry lover, and, most important, unable to cure her dying daughter Hagar. The Biblical Hagar is cast into the desert with her son Ishmael, but when thirst overtakes them, an angel shows them to a well and guides them out of the wilderness to Sinai where Ishmael establishes a progeny. In Song of Solomon , Reba's daughter, Hagar, is cast off by her lover, Milkman, and, heartbroken, dies in a fever" [229].

Ms. Morrison's subversion of the Christian tradition is much richer than Ms. Edelberg suggests. What Ms. Edelberg leaves out of Reba's life is the key to Ms. Morrison's rebellion. Reba's life is rich, in spite of the fact that she is excluded from the beauty, honor, and riches of the Biblical Rebecca. She is not beautiful, but she is sensual and has no problem living "from orgasm to orgasm," which is her wish. She is not honored in society as a whole, but she is respected in the black community because she is Pilate's daughter and she has a gracious soul. She is not rich, but has an uncanny ability to win contests, which supplements the meager income from Pilate's bootlegging enterprise. Ms. Morrison does not merely mock the Biblical figures as Ms. Edelberg suggests. She shows how Reba has happiness despite the fact that she possesses none of the prestigious qualities of the Euro-American ideal.

It is inarguable that these characters come from the Bible, but their treatment is decidedly unique to the two writers. This is because the Christian tradition is more ingrained in the Latin American culture, whereas the African myths and religious life have been less diluted by the western Christian influence. Therefore, Sr. García Márquez's characters are only slightly colored by the historical differences between the Biblical and the Latin worlds. He bases his story on Columbian history, while the Bible is based on Jewish history. But, Ms. Morrison's characters move through a world that not only includes the historical differences, but also includes a stronger attachment to African myth. From *Paradoxical Resolutions:*

"To Morrison, the recognition of African heritage is a psychological necessity. She emphasizes that African folklore has always survived in Afro-American life" [Werner 92].

That folklore is her own, while the Biblical folklore is that of white America. Given the treatment of blacks in America, it is no surprise that Ms. Morrison feels the desire to sever connections to that which has been a basis of the culture of her people's oppressors, and she does this effectively by not only mocking these character models, but by introducing her own values, such as those exemplified by Reba.

These two authors are not dispassionate heirs to the literary tradition of the Bible. They adopt the facets of writing I have discussed, yes, but they have truly made them their own. They have both used the "realistic as well as symbolic purposes" of magic realism (Werner 89). They have chosen characters from the Bible. However, Macondo is not Eden and Shalimar is not the Biblical Solomon's Kingdom. The settings are Colombia and the American South, respectively. The magic and the real are not Middle Eastern, they are Latin American and Afro-American, and the characters live in those worlds. Toni Morrison and Gabriel García Márquez are deserving heirs.

The Bible as Influence

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Beyond Parallelism

"Placing" *The Country Girls*

John Gibson

"Father—the crux of her dilemma" (Epilogue)

As a kunstlerroman by an Irish novelist, *The Country Girls* invites comparison with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* When we remember Caithleen's words, "I had written one or two poems since I came to Dublin" (142), the invitation becomes a necessity. And yet, there are two obvious differences between the books — both author and protagonist of *The Country Girls* are female — that compel me to do more than compare and contrast them. For me, a fundamental question to ask about this novel concerns the position of women in the specific time and place of the action. In particular, I shall focus on the choices open to women in the Ireland of the novel. However, before I turn to my main concern I shall briefly glance at the novel as it traces the development of the heroine on roughly parallel lines to those of Stephen Dedalus.

The author makes it easy for us to "follow the curve of an emotion" from first to last pages of the novel. At the beginning, the reader is given a series of expanding views:

I wakened quickly and sat up in bed abruptly...
Then I went over to let up the blind...
The sun was not yet up, and the lawn was speckled with daisies that were fast asleep. There was dew everywhere. The grass below my window, the hedge around it, the rusty paling wire beyond that, and the big outer field were each touched with a delicate wandering mist...The leaves and the trees were bathed in mist..There was smoke rising from the blue mountain in the distance. (3)

The wakening narrator is experiencing visually what she will come to experience physically: a movement from home to a world beyond the mountain. We can measure that change by noting the lyrical description of the scene at the beginning and juxtaposing it against the last few lines of the novel. Caithleen has returned to her boarding house, after her failed tryst with Mr. Gentleman. She comes unexpectedly face to face with "a strange young man who was holding a brass instrument in one hand and a polishing rag in the other." She offers him a cup of tea:

"No English speak," he said. God, I thought, as if it makes any difference to whether you like tea or not. I poured him a cup and brought it in. "No English speak," he said, as he shrugged his shoulders. I came out to the kitchen and took two aspirins with my tea. It was almost certain that I wouldn't sleep that night."

Outside of Beckett and Kafka, there could hardly be a more typical scene of alienation. To say this is not to overlook that the protagonist's situation at the beginning of the novel contains its own powerful alienating element in the person of Caithleen's father.

Between the beginning and the end of the novel Caithleen makes five explicit statements which mark the major steps in her development. The first of these occurs at the end of Chapter 5, on the morning after the news of her mother's disappearance. It records the trauma of her mother's death: "It was the last day of my childhood" (45). The second statement occurs at the end of Chapter 7, after the trip to Limerick with Mr. Gentleman: "It was the happiest day of my whole life" (56). The third, is her comment on the night spent in the infirmary of the convent after her and Baba's disgrace: "It was the longest night I have ever lived" (106). (Significantly, this is followed by a page later by her outburst against her father —— "I hate you.") The fourth closes the sequence of the night out with Reginald and Harry when Caithleen

returns to find Mr. Gentleman waiting for her: "That was the first Sunday I missed Mass" (158). The last of these declarations follows the scene in which she and Mr. Gentleman experience each other's nakedness: "I was too happy to go to sleep" (164). Inextricably mixed in this emotional record are Caithleen's awakening sexuality, her rejection of family, in the person of her father, and her rejection of the Church. To make the parallel with Stephen Dedalus, it is only necessary to point out that her leaving the village and her move to Dublin are the first steps of an exile which will be completed in the second novel of the trilogy when Caithleen moves to London.

Although it is perhaps in the "curve of an emotion" that a similarity between the stories of Stephen and Caithleen can best be discerned, more specific resemblances can be seen in the detail of the action. The decay of the farm and the ultimate foreclosure of the mortgage which forces Mr. Brady into the gate lodge is pre-figured in the decline of the Dedalus family, marked by the frequent moves into shabbier and shabbier neighborhoods. In each case the decline is caused by the failings of the father. Caithleen's father, however, is a more degenerate type of the alcoholic, shiftless, wanting-to-be-liked good fellow than the rather likeable elder Dedalus in the first two chapters of *A Portrait*. The two protagonists themselves share important characteristics: they are both good scholars, winning prizes and scholarships; they are both sensitive souls who undergo torment at the hands of their extrovert friends; they are both (Caithleen, less obviously) responsive to literature. Again, it is tempting to press the parallels further — in the matter of their sexual awakening, for example — but, for me, the differences which arise from personality and gender outweigh the superficial similarities. To illustrate this last point we might consider the surface similarity of the scene in *A Portrait* where Stephen confronts the rector of Clongowes and that scene in *The Country Girls* where Caithleen has to apologize to the Reverend Mother. Both of them have been unjustly punished, but their reactions indicate a fundamental difference of character: the difference between active subject and passive object; Caithleen submits, first to the chastisement and then to Baba and her planned rebellion; Stephen, admittedly egged on by his classmates, protests, ultimately in individual isolation.

Despite the fact that the two novels are situated on either side of the great twentieth century divide in Irish history, the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922, Caithleen's isolation has its origin in a rural version of the same national community as Stephen. But the story of her isolation is radically different by virtue of her sex. In passing, it might be remarked that the world of Tarry Flynn is nearer to Caithleen's country than Stephen's Dublin and the problems that the growing Lois fails to solve in *The Last September* resemble, despite the difference of class, those of Caithleen.

At this point I have to come clean and declare that I accept the feminist position that women are largely defined by what can be loosely referred to as the patriarchy and that any escape from this masculine definition is only won at great cost. In *The Country Girls* we are shown in no uncertain manner the process of that definition, but there is no planned rebellion against it, only a baffled self-annihilating cry: "I hate being a woman, vain and shallow and superficial" (161). What is it that drives Caithleen to this self-denial? The question can be answered by dissolving it into two related questions: What were the choices available to a woman in the Ireland of the late forties and early fifties? How do men figure in the growing girl's world?

As always, the starting point to the last question is the father, and Caithleen's father haunts her from start to finish. In my earlier reference to the opening of the novel I deliberately excised everything in the first paragraph after the opening sentence, as I wanted to concentrate on the widening view that is given us. The omission reads: "It is only when I am anxious that I waken easily and for a minute I did not know why my heart was beating faster than usual. Then I remembered. The old reason. He had not come home." He is also present in his absence in the debacle of Gentleman's absence: "EVERYTHING GONE WRONG. THREATS FROM YOUR FATHER..." (179). This last reference is especially significant since it is an

indirect and characteristic — in the hinted at violence— attempt on the part of a man to control woman's sexuality. This controlling is no mere individual action, it is the ideological underpinning of the world of the novel: the Catholic Church. The exaltation of the Virgin Mother of God and the insistence on the Primal Mother's first bite of the apple beget the antithetical twin stereotypes of madonna and temptress. Combine such ideology with the economic facts of life of rural Ireland and the result is a morality of appearance and double standards, a world in which the nubile Caithleen is subjected to the wolf whistles of the country boys, the maundering attentions of a Jack Holland (remember he had tried to be her mother's lover) and the Humbert Humbert pursuit of a J.W. Gentleman. Nor is Dublin much better; the deracinated Caithleen has the alternatives of the brilliantined boys of the dance halls or the middle-aged, middle class roues of the better commercial hotels.

The choices open to Caithleen in such a world are starkly apparent: the working wife of farmer or tradesman, the gruelling routine of the skivvy, the marginalized life of the professional spinster, the vacant hours of the bourgeoise wife, the vita contemplativa or walled-in teaching of the nun, the false glamour of the whore. Ironically, though not in the case of Caithleen's mother, the woman of the first category might come to wield power over men, especially their sons. Their shadows fall somberly across the pages of the early part of the novel — the mothers of Billy Tuohey and Jack Holland, the strong independent-minded gossipy draper, Mrs. O'Brien, and Mrs. O'Shea of the Greyhound Hotel. (In Dublin, there is the boarding house landlady, Joanne.) Miss Moriarty, though making but a brief appearance, is an example of the second kind. The Brennan's servant, Molly, most obviously represents the domestic drudge. The near-alcoholic Martha, mother of Baba, the shadowy neurotic Mr. Gentleman, and Harry's golfing Betty typify the bourgeoise wife. The contemplative nuns take over Caithleen's old home; the teaching nuns demand almost four years of her life. Baba almost dances the pair of them down the whore's path.

We began by following "the curve of an emotion" and moved to a consideration of the essentially female nature of this experience. One further aspect of this brief look at the problem of the girl protagonist remains: the lived physical reality. At the end of the novel, Caithleen is still a virgin, though she has been naked with a man. She has allowed herself to experience the possibility of carnal delight. That she is denied the full joy of love-making is in some measure of a piece with the way she has experienced her own body. This experience is rooted in the sexual preferences of men. She worries that she is underweight, that her legs are "thin and sad in the black cotton stockings," and later reacts anxiously to Gentleman's remark that she is "plump." The real giveaway is when she seeks validation from Baba:

"...I asked her to explain, 'Baba, what's Rubenesque?'
'I don't know. Sexy. I suppose. Why?'
'A customer said I was that'" (144).

Where else, but in the visual arts, are we so conscious of the male ideal of feminine beauty? The human desire for love in the case of women is all too often reduced to little more than the need to please men. Caithleen is certainly so constrained. My perception of this constraint underlies my assertion that the gender difference between Stepehn Dedalus and Caithleen Brady overpowers the formal and thematic parallels between *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Country Girls*.

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John Huston:
Three Cinematic Jewels

Mark David Vincent

Introduction

If there is one word to describe the late John Huston, it would have to be gregarious; Huston had been an actor, painter, writer, equestrian, boxer, gambler, womanizer, and, above all, a brilliant film director. Montgomery Clift, after the filming of *The Misfits*, said about this enigmatic director, "I admire his relish for life," [p.360]

Like his father, Walter Huston, a highly underrated actor, John lead a nomadic life style. He never stayed in one place for long, drifting from city to city, and job to job. In Huston's autobiography *An Open Book*, published in 1980, he said about his lifestyle: "I lived a number of lives. I'm inclined to envy the man who leads one life, with one job, and one wife, in one country, under one God. It may not be a very exciting existence, but at least by the time he's seventy-three he knows how old he is ..." [p.5. par. 3]

While on the set of *The Misfits* Clark Gable made some observations about his director: "Huston was carousing, performing, and worst of all ... gambling nightly at Reno, dropping thousands of dollars at a clip and bragging about it on the set." Huston proclaimed, "the one great lesson in gambling is that money doesn't mean a goddamn thing." [p.389]. Huston's gambling and high living was the principle cause of most of his personal problems; he had married five wives.

Huston had a passion for painting; he studied in Paris between writing jobs at MGM and Universal studios in the 1930's, before his major success in both writing and directing films. His love of painting was a major influence on his visual style as a director. This visual style is evident in three of his finest films, *The Maltese Falcon, 'The Asphalt Jungle,* and his last film, *The Dead*. The purpose of this essay is to examine Huston's work as a director and in the process learn something about John Huston — the man.

John Huston, as a director, had an excellent sense of pacing, knowing instinctively not to elaborate on a scene much too long. This is evident in the overall body of his work. Pacing, or rhythm, is one of the elements that makes for excellent direction in film and one of the secrets to Huston's enduring career as a director.

Huston's first major success was *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) which he adapted from Dashiell Hammett's novel, and was his directorial debut. It was a popular success and revived the gangster film genre. His opening exterior shots of the Golden Gate Bridge diagonally fading into the background is indicative of his artistic sense of perspective. This technique directs the viewer's attention into the picture frame and draws them into the film.

Before shooting *The Maltese Falcon*, Huston made sketches to guide him in his direction. This technique is called "story boarding" and is now commonly used in preproduction for most films produced today. Huston was one of the first American filmmakers to use this technique.

Critics of *The Maltese Falcon* fault it for the one-dimensional characterizations and wooden dialogue that are reminiscent of Hammett's pulp novel. But, Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre made up a very special chemistry that worked well with Huston's direction. The feel of the film borders on being "noir," but is much less cynical than, say, Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Its success, however, did pave the way for the American "noir" genre films that would follow.

After two other major successes, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) and *Key Largo* (1948) at Warner Brothers, Huston directed a film at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) called *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). This film deals with a jewel heist and how it is elaborately planned out. It was a milestone film which has been remade many times and its imitators are often referred to as "caper" films.

What distinguishes this film from its numerous imitators is Huston's visual style. He made use of the idea of perspective as an allegory of the power relationships between the characters in the story. He first used this idea in his film *The*

Treasure of the Sierra Madre and it is evident in the *The Asphalt Jungle,* particularly in the scenes where Dix Handley (Sterling Hayden) and Alonzo D. Emmerich (Louis Calhern) appear together.

In much simpler terms, Huston would frame a scene which would make the character, Dix, look larger and more powerful in relation to a character like Emmerich. It is a subtle message that is not readily apparent to the audience watching the film. The climactic scenes in the film are when Dix is badly wounded by the police and his subsequent getaway. These scenes were filmed with many different quick cuts, or what is referred to as reaction shots, give the film a sense of urgency, and draws the audience's attention.

The Asphalt Jungle is an overlooked classic, which started a new genre in film; courtesy of Mr. Huston and the film's co-writer, Ben Maddow.

In the intervening years, Huston directed the highly successful film *The African Queen* (1951), shot on location in Africa, *The Misfits* (1960) - which was both Marilyn Monroe's and Clark Gable's last film - *Fat City* (1972), *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975), *Prizzi's Honor* (1987), and his last film, *The Dead* (1988).

One of John Huston's favorite books was James Joyce's *Ulysses.* It was only a matter of time before Huston would pay homage to this great twentieth century writer. His son, Tony Huston, adapted Joyce's short story, *The Dead*, and his daughter, Angelica, took on the role of Gretta Conroy. Despite John Huston's ill health (emphysema) the production went forward.

The beauty of Joyce's story is in its simplicity. The central character, Gabriel Conroy, makes a discovery about his wife's past, seen through Gabriel's point of view. The setting is Dublin, Ireland, in the late nineteenth century, and the story opens at a party thrown by some friends of the Conroy's.

As the story progresses, Gabriel's wife, Gretta, tells him of her past lover, a young boy whom she knew in her youth, who sang her a folk song, "The Lass of Aughrim." His name was Michael Furey and he loved her so much, that, on hearing of her departure, although ill, he travelled to see her in the bitter cold and snow just to catch a glimpse of her. He died soon after of exposure and, some would say, of a broken heart.

John Huston was able to faithfully capture the essence of Joyce's prose and translate it to the screen with all its subtle nuances. The eighty-one-year old director was able to distill a bit of his magic into this project, which made many of his earlier films classics. The results, although he never lived to see its completion, testify to the man's genius.

In the last scene of Joyce's story, we the readers read what Gabriel is thinking:

> *Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen, and farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thick drifted on the crooked crosses and head stones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His souls wooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.* (p. 843-844)

Huston decided that the only way he could do justice in adapting this ending to the film, was by using Joyce's prose as a voice-over — it works brilliantly.

John Huston has left a legacy not unlike that of the writer he last paid homage to, James Joyce. Like Joyce, he observed humanity and recorded his perceptions of who and what we are. He spun tales of our aspirations and failures, and he set them down in a powerful medium — film — for all of us to see. Above all, he reminds us that life is much too short, and, like him, we should relish it with every fiber of our existence.

John Huston

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The Sinner's Mask

David Luz

The silence of the empty building was broken by a woman; the heels of her shoes slapped the brittle tiles as she rushed toward the front of the church. This stop was going to make her late, there was no doubt about that, but she needed to talk to him. She had waited long enough as it was...

"Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned...," said the woman as she sat on a cold, wooden bench.

The person whom the woman asked forgiveness from, sat curled up in a tight ball on the other side of a confessional booth - his head wedged between the narrow gap that separated his thick forearms. Both hands attacked the gray hair on the back of his neck-- his fingers pulling and twisting the short curls as he tried to concentrate on what he was supposed to be doing.

"It has been two months since my last confession...," continued the woman.

What Jack Kloke was supposed to be doing was listening to confession, but he couldn't do that if he let his mind drift away on other things. He pulled his hands away from his neck and sat up straight, trying to regain some of the composure that he had let slip away moments before this woman had come in to talk to him.

"Go on, my child...," he said, as he pulled his collar away from his throat. The air inside the confessional never circulated very well, but he found it especially stifling today. Perhaps it was not the air, but his thoughts that stifled him. For although he was reluctant to admit to himself, Father Kloke knew very well where his mind had wandered. It had once again opened doors that should have stayed closed. And it had happened because there were too many things that were bothering Jack; things that made it extremely difficult for him while he was in the confessional. The simple reality of what happened to his people during their confessional cycles was irritating him more than ever. His sixteen years as a priest had helped him to conclude that these people travelled in a circle that moved from the outside world, into the confessional booth, and then back into the outside world again. The people who came to see him in the booth were not the same people they pretended to be in the outside world. Out there, they wore their masks tightly, concealing the sinners they revealed to Father Kloke when they stepped inside his sacred box. He had to talk to their consciences while people in their everyday lives talked to the strangers they masqueraded as. He heard about all the bad things they had done—the lies they had told; the temptations they had given in to. They used the confessional booth because they needed to take their masks off, for they needed to rest for just a little while from the hidden pressures their false faces put on them. Pretending to be someone you're not can become very painful at times. And when they were finished, they simply strapped them back on and stepped back into the real world, until it was time to rest again.

"Since my last confession...," said the woman, "I have lied to my husband at least a dozen times...and...," the woman paused for a momnet, hesitant to reveal herself at first, but then finding the strength to pull off the mask, "I've been beating my puppy again."

This was a good example of another thing that was bothering Father Kloke; he seriously didn't think that the people of his congregation sinned hard enough. He used to think that was a horrible thought for a priest to have. But after two years of listening to the people of St. Anthony's find such deep anguish in their petty sins, he was convinced they were overreacting.

"I don't mean to," said the woman, quiet tears drowning her words, "but I get so frustrated at home sometimes, and I end up taking it out on my innocent puppy."

Puppy beating.

Jack thought about it for a moment. Did God own a dog? Did heaven have a leash law? Do you go to hell if your dog shits on thy neighbor's lawn? Or was it they neighbor's wife? Jack wasn't sure he knew at the moment. Lately it was hard to make sense of a lot of things when he was inside the confessional booth. Perhaps it was because he was too preoccupied in here, for he knew that it was here that he had to work the hardest to keep his own mask on. People like this woman helped to knock it loose; they found so much pain in their petty guilts that it pushed his own, deepy covered guilt closer to the surface. There had been times, in the past, yes, but mostly since he had come back to Fairview, when he wanted to rip his mask off and reveal himself to his people—so for a moment they could understand what sin was, and for the same moment he could feel some relief from the pain he was concealing.

"Will God forgive me? asked the woman, sounding as if she felt she had just helped nail Jesus to the cross.

Jack listened to the woman but thought about himself. Why had he become so cynical? Had he grown so discontent with himself that he couldn't understand why others held on so tightly to their faith? Were they wrong for believing in a God who wouldn't help him?...Deep in his mind, there was a flickering light at the end of the tunnel that provided him with hope. For sixteen years it had carried him by telling him to keep the mask on: "There is still time," it whispered to him, "you can still save yourself." That is what had kept him moving forward for so long now—a dying light in an imaginary tunnel.

"God will forgive you," said Father Kloke, the light helping him to find the words that he himself wanted to hear so badly, "but you must repent."

"I will Father."

"Your penance is to say ten Hail Mary's and ten 'Our Father's".

"God bless you, Father," said the woman, and she moved out of the booth and towards the altar, where he could soon hear her sobbing in her penance.

The wooden walls of the confessional echoed the silence that now surrounded Father Kloke. In the world outside of the booth, life was still moving: the puppy beater cried over her prayers; a stiff broom scraped the hard floors of the church. But in his immediate setting there was nothing: no noise...no light...no space. All there really was right now was time—time to kill until his own penance was over and he could remove himself from the confessional. He knew from experience that it had to be just past five-thirty, for most of his sinners came to him before that time so they could sit through the early mass in the upstairs church. From five-thirty to six Jack usually waited for time to dissolve so he could be finished. He sat back on his bench and tried to relax.

But he couldn't.

Jack Kloke couldn't relax because he knew his penance wasn't over yet. There was still one person that he expected to hear from—the one person who talked to Jack who really understood what sin was. It was the one voice that actually intrigued him while he was inside the confessional. It was the voice that had visited with him faithfully since he had come back to Fairview.

He had spent most of his childhoold in Fairview; his family had moved to town when he was too young to even to go to school. Fifteen years later, he graduated from the town's high school at the top of his class, both academically and athletically, attributes which had made him popular with his fellow students and the townspeople. The summer following graduation, he had planned to travel "cross-country" with a few friends: Mr. Kloke had always told his son that he should live a little before he went on to college. Mr. Kloke, unfortunately, was destined to only "live a little"; he was killed along with his wife and daughter, their only child besides Jack, in a car accident a week before his son was about to follow his advice.

For a little while, Jack tried to stay in Fairview, but the town held too many memories of a family that no longer existed. So he decided to get away, to leave for a while with the hope that new sights could help overcome painful memories. He left on the trip that his father had helped him plan, but he left alone, telling his friends that he simply

wanted to be by himself. Fairview didn't see him again for almost twenty-three years.

Nobody was really sure what happened to Jack Kloke while he was one the road, probably because he didn't talk about it much. One thing was for sure, however; something had guided him very well, because he walked back into town as a veteran priest! This was not the most predictable of outcomes, to say the least. Jack was undoubtedly morally good enough to become a priest, but his handsome features and large, powerful frame had always made him a favorite with the ladies, too. Many high school girls had often dreamed of staring into his bright green eyes, and many of them got their chance. To think that this Romeo could give up his Juliettes for the sake of God was hard to believe! But this is what had happened, and the townspeople accepted him for what he was. Those who were in Fairview before he left thought admirably of him for his achievements, and others who didn't know him from before were quick to believe that he was a man who deserved their respect.

But that one voice seemed to know that Father Kloke didn't really deserve anybody's respect. That man who had come to him so often when the confessional was its quietest had always seemed familiar to him. He had heard other voices like this one when he was a younger priest; they were the voices that doubted God and refused to repress their sins and live with guilt like everyone else. But the man from Fairview was even stronger and more intimate than the voices from his past. As far as Jack could tell, this man didn't cover himself with a mask. He didn't need to: he understood his sins and he understood his guilt, but he wasn't afraid of either of them. He almost seemed proud of them, or at least some aspect of them that Jack couldn't grasp. When this man confessed to Jack, he sounded as if he were a high school athlete boasting in a locker room...

"I strangled her, Jack," the voice would say, (he had been calling Jack by his first name for a long time), "and then I had to kill him, too."

"God will forgive you, my child," Jack would say, trying to offer the man some help, "but you must repent.."

"God doesn't give a shit about me, Jack, and you know it."

"But God can help..."

"God cannot help!" the voice would scream. "God can only hide my guilt! How many God damned 'Hail Marys' is it gonna take to save me, Jack?"

Jack Kloke was obsessed with this man. He was afraid of this voice because of the anger it refused to hide; sometiems he actually thought the man might even try to hurt him. But he didn't think this person was necessarily evil either. He had obviously done something very bad once, but there was something else, something that he was covering up instead of confessing, and that was what was hurting him now. Jack felt compelled to talk to him because that voice had something he wanted. Perhaps it was something the voice didn't have that Jack wanted.

The world outside the booth had faded away, so that the only sound he heard was the quiet emptiness of his confessional. The darkness that surrounded him was slowly sucked into his mind. It crawled through the tunnels of his imagination, quietly closing the doors to reality. Jack looked for his flickering light, but he couldn't find it. Had it finally died, overcome by the darkness that had been consuming it all along? His question would remain unanswered, for his isolation was violated as someone stepped inside the booth to talk to him.

"Forgive me, Jack, for I have sinned..." The voice never trembled with fear or uncertainty. "It has been thirty days since my last confession..."

And thirty days that I have been waiting for you, thought Jack.

"In that time, I have not repented for my greatest sins...," confessed the voice.

"You have not tried to let God help," said Jack, knowing very well the response he would get.

"God cannot help me, Jack, God can only hide me.'

"That is not so, my child..."

"Has God helped you, Jack?" interrupted the voice.

Jack hesitated, unsure of where the voice was taking him. "Yes," he proceeded, "yes, he has."

"Clairmont is pretty far away from you now," said the voice.

Again Jack hesitated, this time because he knew where the voice was going. "Who are you?" he finally asked, the words spilling over the edge of his mouth.

"Clairmont is where is happened," said the voice, ignoring Jack's question. "Don't you remember? You lived there for almost two months...until you found out she was married."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" insisted Jack, his face pressed closely against the metal grate that divided them so he could yell in his whisper.

"Yes you do," said the voice in a superior tone. "You don't have to wear that mask with me, Jack...I know all about you..."

"No you don't!" pleaded Jack. The man had never gone this far before—he had never directly mentioned the masks, and he had never accused Jack of wearing one. Jack felt helpless: unable to control his emotions, incapable of censoring himself. "You only know about yourself...," he told the voice, "...you can't help yourself, so you have to try and hurt me..."

"Hurt is something you know about, isn't it Jack?"

"SHUT UP!" screamed Jack—he had yelled without even realizing it.

"All alone on the road, Jack...no family, no home...you just wanted someone to care about. Just a kid, remember, Jack?..."
The man spoke with compassion, as if he sympathized with Jack for a moment. But that moment soon ended, and he once again resumed a tone or persecution..."Do you remember all the pain that kid caused, Jack?"

No answer.

"But she hurt you, too, didn't she? Betrayed you...lied to you!...she was the only thing you had, and when her husband walked back into her life, you found out you didn't even really have her...ever!" The voice paused for a moment, to let Jack think about what he had said. "Do you think she hurt for a long time when you wrapped your hands around her throat?" he continued. "Do you remember what her eyes looked like, Jack?"

Jack's body was frozen; he wanted to jump out of the confessional, but he couldn't move. His hands were nailed to the bench they clutched, his feet anchored to the floor they wanted to run away from. Something pierced his chest, and a chilling pain began to grow from it.

"And you loved her, didn't you, Jack?" It was said so softly, almost tenderly.

He inhaled deeply, trying to relax his body. The pain in his chest had infected his arms and his legs. He could feel it pushing itself unmercifully through his veins. His mouth screamed for moisture; he tried to lick his lips, but felt only chapped skin against his tongue.

"I never told you that I tried to repent for my sins," confessed the man, for some reason sounding as if he were struggling.

Jack heard metal scraping together. His neck had grown stiff, but he twisted it enough to see that the grate dividing the booths was being pulled apart...the man on the other side was trying to pull it off.

"I thought God could help me, too," said the man, straining as he tried to bend the metal divider away from its wooden frame.

"Leave me alone!" yelled Jack. He knew now that the man had always wanted to hurt him. All along he had been there, waiting for the right time.

"But I didn't play around, Jack," said the man, as he tore the grate totally off of its frame and shoved his upper body through the hold and into Jack's side of the confessional. "I didn't ask for forgiveness so I could be part of God's flock," he continued, as he stared into Jack's eyes, "I tried to cover it all up by becoming one of his shepherds!"

Jack Kloke screamed as a hand reached towards him and ripped something off of his face. The pain inside his body exploded as he looked at the man, trying to see who it was, but he was only able to focus on his eyes. His life stopped as he glared into them; his dying sight being a bright green image of himself reflected by the eyes of a true sinner.

The woman who had lasted talked to the priest heard the scream and ran to the confessional booth, only to find Father Kloke dead—a crinkled

hand clutched to the heart that had failed him. She located the other priests in the rectory and told them what had happened. The commotion it started died down an hour later, with the ambulance driveers taking the body to the morgue until it was decided where and when he should be buried. The woman then returned to the altar, for the Father's death had interrupted her penance. She finished her final 'Our Father', said a small prayer for her late priest, and then hurried out of the church as quickly as she could. Father Kloke's death had made her extremely late, and knowing both her husband and dog were still waiting at home to be fed made her feel very guilty.



Sonnet 29

Am I a victim, or sweet nature's child?
Progressive thought will be my last surmise.
When daisies kiss do green fields run wild?
When oceans touch a hand is that so wise?
The rain is falling, here, but it may end,
Or may, for ever, run amid the stream;
The grass thinks that the wind will come and bend
Each Postulant into the man they seem.
Sweet magic river, love her please and I,
For I am just her left and she my right.
In love, for ever, victim is a lie,
Then lie not to me, Nature, she is light.
For ever, less will be my only care
And more I will love her, the more I bear.

— *Stephen Michael Mellor*

Tahilla

Crumbling house of petrified teacups
where statuettes still spread their hands
to God, still crush snakes
beneath their feet,
your walls were once the world
to me. Now no one is left,
not even the whinny
of a grandmother's kettle.

No one stays here any more
when they come to this country;
the beds are rotted,
you are suspended
in a shroud of wind and rain.
I come to unravel my heart
thread by thread in the fields
where I played,
almost expecting to find
my bright-colored ball
shimmering in the dim ferns,
almost thinking I'll see you
light up the darkness and lead
me home like a cold glowing star.
But your light has flickered out, haunting
every twist of the black road to town.

— *Kathleen Vejvoda*

THE VISITOR'S SONG

Rock me
Like the waves
Of a little
' Lase ' island.
Gently, gently,
Where my Sun
Is shining
As he holds me
And sings,
" You're crying,
You're crying —
You're going away."

'Au domoni Viti
Au domoni
Domoni.'

But these tears
Are not all sad,
Each one
A souvenir
Of the salt
Upon your body,
And the waves
That splash
So gently
On my boat
Returning.

- *Nikki Michellé*

We Love

I am a shrew.
Of grit and pain I live my life,
In everlasting struggle
Just to survive.
You are a gazelle;
Of grace and skill you take your stride.
You live in peace; you do not have to kill
To keep yourself alive.
So here we are
And yet
We love.
We see in each other what we never could have in ourselves,
Yet always desired.
We love
And our hearts are fused as strips of steel
Under a welder's hand.
Your tender fingertips glide across my splintered skin,
Making it smooth.
My teeth, those large, steely incisors
Dive into your flesh;
Releasing the wild lion within me
For you to satisfy
Its greedy appetite,
As we lay intertwined
In the grasses
Of the Eden we have created for ourselves.
They look at us,
But they do not see through us with their X-ray vision.
Everybody has X-ray vision,
But many do not use it;
They find it easier to see
With their regular vision
And go by what appears
To be true.
They say we cannot make love,
That only the married can share in each other.
But within ourselves we see
The rings of gold upon our fingers
That their eyes overlook.
They say our love is obscene, despicable.
That in it, no beauty is to be found.
But we love.
Isn't that beauty in itself?

— *Julie Hankinson*

Desert Horseman

A quarter moon
and stars so bright
I can see the dark side
and you
come out of these valleys
where Moses
and caravans
left hints of their lives.

The kaffiyeh
flows beyond your shoulders
brushes my desire
and the white cloth covering your thigh.

My throat constricts
for I have heard of the danger
of you
who roam in a history
that stopped
soon after Mohammed
when the words of the wind
were still known.

— Edie Mueller

Blind Aegis

cloaked in the coffin
of his second eldest's drowning
he never warned the others of
matches, paint chips
crossing without looking
the bleach under the sink

he flipped through
waiting room magazines
sweating only a confidence
his wife smelled as indifference

but the hospital shuffles the deck
between shifts

home, he locked
the remaining in their rooms
posting himself
hallway sentry

-Gerry J. Waggett

Frankie Dies

Frankie dies
and his life
is laid out on a table
for everyone to see.

The ghoulish line
has wrapped around
the funeral parlor.
Everyone is here —
Cops, junkies, and Family.

A power cousin points.
Says something about the mob.
Part-time father — Drunk,
calls for a head.

He's dead
no more Cadillac
no more coke sluts
with styling gel
for brains

The open nostril weasel friends,
the ones that did lines
before coming to the wake,
won't be calling
anymore.

I wonder if that 10-year-old
who thought Frankie was a god
and who wrote a poem entitled
The King Is Dead
will read my poem?

— *Jack Leach*

The End Of Love At The Center Of The Earth

Standing in the Mapparium,
one whisper near Panama
became a roar in China —
Your quiet verdict was a cloudburst,
pouring over the crowd
that walked through the globe.
My sigh thundered in all
those ears. In that moment,
the earth's axis choked on its gears.

— *Christopher Jackson*

The B-Side of Desire

I sat across from you
at a table covered with rings,
but our coffee mugs were always midway to our mouths,
the coffee halfway down our throats.

Meanwhile....

somewhere the house was falling in on itself,
things crumbling, fact into fiction,
like something coming apart in your hands,
a beautiful, useless thing,
imploding into the heart of dust.

Still....

we sat, and asked for more sugar,
and stirred endless circles,
and sipped until our tongues were thick,
and in silence we saw it — behind our eyes —

What is there?

Picture, dream, word, aspirin lately
the granules stuck, refusing to melt.
I practice swallowing until I think I forget how.
(My mother taught me to crush it with a spoon,
to hide it in applesauce, to make no faces.)

There it goes, a nodule of memories
down.

— *Sally DeAngelis*

Fuck Off

daring, rippling ocean waves
lulling, sweeping
crashing, breaking
seaglass
broken shells
smooth rocks and sand
so much sand
soft under my toes
endless, growing
before my eyes
sea air in my face
salty mists
tangle my hair
boats moving like ants
sandpipers scurrying
seagulls crying
those wretching familiar cries
the smell of the sea
I smell it with my eyes
so intense the smell
unlike any other
unmistakable
undeniable
and you
you tell me
you insist
that I am not at the beach
for a minute
I almost believe you
leave me to my beach
or if you prefer
my illusion
my distortion
my ocean
is not for you to pollute
to rip off
I don't need your explanations
your perceptions of ocean

— *R.I.*

Amelia Earhart

Silence was impossible
in that cramped, noisy
plane where she spent

days and days watching
horizons slip away.
Childless, she named

her children Sky, Cloud,
Rain. She was always
searching for Blue.

— *Edie Mueller*

Early Spring, Early Morning

Just you name me a morning more
Than this one. It smells of rain
Soaked up to the sky
In a no cloud birthday suit,
And the Charles River
Is more sleek than the air

There's a crew team cool
Each sweat-suited jewel:
Out Garnet reaches
Oar-lifting Topaz
And Ruby, they move along
Stroke, stroke, stroking,
Pass slick as a snake
Without the squiggle
Under the bridge

Under my feet
Towards the next bridge,
Where they're out -
Brightened by too orange
Two trucks that promise
"The Works."

- *Nikki Michellé*

A Burned-out Pier At Sunset

I found you then
a blackened skeleton wading in a sea of Malachi
white bone-spurs sticking to your legs
that scraped the bows
of the infinite arks
that left no wake
upon our memory.

Who was it then who set you blazing
where our brothers despise brothers?
Oh, platform of repentance,
ladder to the hunted primordial sea
where we whiners come to kneel
when the shivers of death
breath too close.

Perhaps it was a bolt of lightning
from the hammering god
of cultures past
or Saint Elmo's fire
crackling back upon your spines
in molten Hiroshima light
where the past becomes the future
as the future repeats past.

Do angry gods wheel stars around
and turn the fates against us all?
Will what's been built up
forever be hurled down
in the broken babble
of a sea bird's call?

Who will kindle the fire upon this altar
if you will not receive our offering
of whispered fear
in worried faces
at the twilight hour
of our civilization?

And who will sing the song of peace
when the song of arms has a prettier tune?

Now wrapped in your cathedral of ocean sounds
and creaking bones
the sea bell tolls out its icy cry of innocence
for all the whirling creatures of the tides.
Its toning voice
echoes across the waters
of the Old Testament God.

Forever angered and sullen
the old bulged eye squirts out across the rotted pier
where I stand at the edge looking down.
Below, lies the leaden waters
of the sorcerers of Los Alamos.

In times past
Poseidon might have raised his trident up
to shake the earth and drown us all
but the sea rolls onward
unconcerned and patient
washing the groaning pilings
scouring the foam-drenched barnacles
pushing the split charred embers
that move slowly into the dark.

— *R.B. Fitzgerald*

We Are Not Begging Your Apology

We are not
begging your apology —
sympathetic hearts
do not give blood
to our murdered fathers,
stiff and noble statues
will not suffice,
tokens of acceptance
are taken with offense.

We have opened our doors
once too often
to help you brave the storm,
to share our feast and manners
to understand your mystery.

Now the light removes you
from the shadows,
makes your deceptions clear.
We have mastered your language
deciphered your codes
suffered your prisons —

LISTEN TO ME,

We are not begging your apology,
We only wish to be left alone.

- *Sandra Heddon*

(For Sherry Means, a representative
of the American Indian Movement)



Linda Kenneally



Elizabeth A. Lennon

A-1 Mile a Minute Run on Rag
A Political Statement Maybe

Once in the rocket's red glare
bird's eye view god bless America
go in low and hit 'em hard
before they land in our backyard
and fuck up our god damn
Christian Republic amen
He's on our side
helped us win
two World Wars
by gum and by golly
but Jesus Christ
during Vietnam He was going through
a bad stretch
and that's why we lost
'cause the cause was just
we just blew it
despite the pockmarked earth upon which
metal death rained
and flaming people running from
the righteous wrath of we great soldiers
of the Almighty Disciples of Christ
gone crackers
while archbishops ministers rabbis
and other god groovers
and scripture spitters
spewed propaganda for the ministers of war
who initiated aggression
by marshalling men for that purpose
and called it *defense*
By god
they're not comin' onto
our home turf
it's a long way from Asia
and them little suckers is
water walkers
and by the great god given gams
of my favorite movie star
we'll get them little mothers
long before they hit the Rio Grande
parade through downtown Pasadena
or bounce
the bandy-legged little bastards
into holy Bakersfield
And so we gotta vote for them hard-core
god damned right wing Republicans
and not for none o' them liberal damn Democrats
'cause them Dems won't stick up for America
like the Guts 'n' Glory Gang
our friends on the right can field
especially when the sons they field
are someone else's
and the welfare is startin'
to cost a lot
don'tcha know
an' we may be a Great Society
but we gotta cut costs somewhere
so why not start at the uh
with the uh
with the less fortunate I guess
is what the Bleedin" Hearts is callin' 'em
these days
'cause otherwise
them liberals will tax us to death
an' what then?
What then is I mean the Pink People
will take over and then the country
will turn a darker hue of the
same color
and then what?
Then what is they'll take away
all our privates
our privates will then be public
an' won't *that* be a pretty sight
So what we need is to turn America
into one large huge monster corporation
an' then we can all sing
Way Down Yonder in Some Other Folks' Nation
We Killed and Died for the Corporation
oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah
an' we'll all be so bloody busy
what with corporate expansion an' all
we'll never again hafta worry 'bout
unemployment
No more stasis
the company store on a global basis
and the Reverend Righteous is railing
against the godless specter of the
Red Hordes
an' by sweet swingin' Jesus

they's gonna stiff the commercials
'cause
he's so fired up
an' what will the corporate sponsors
think of god now
But of course the Rev. is about to
bring down lightning bolts
on the heads of
all non-believers
(so who needs SDI?)
and go especially hard
on lefto pinko nutbags
He says he's doin' god's work
an' I'm sure he's sincere
but I just wish to Christ
someone would throw a fucking net
over his ass
his god
or better yet both
and let the rest of us have some
bloody peace
Call to all cretins
Call to all cretins
Have no fear
Have no sweat
We're walking hand in glove
with the iron jockstrap set
An' hallelujah! Sweet lord of
the everlasting Almighty
spread your tender mercies
with smoke and fire across the bows
of them little beggars an' suckers
from way down south
what's comin' north
to get us holy howlers of the
Bible Thumpin' Pulpit Poundin'
Congregation of the International
Multinational Worldwide
Stick it to 'em Political Stability
Economic Salvation Through Capital
Expansion Church
'An them what says we're hypocrites
is lyin'
An' you see that for your very own
selves can't you?
'cause after all
who was it that not only brought you
the *word*
but god his very own self
an' stuffed 'im in a suit of
Day Glo satin
stuck 'im on the dummy tube
an' had 'im singin' that old
toe tappin' number
"I'm a Sheep to be Shorn" in no time flat
an' so what if his voice ain't the greatest
we've ever heard
this ain't the only gig he's got ya know
an' besides we can all join in at the
ba ba ba part
so why bitch?
The poor bastard is doin' 'is best
to encourage the flock to vote
in the right direction
'cause that's what votin's all about
direction direction direction
an' ya gotta be careful to do it *right*
an' don't mind them disingenuous
dipsticks includin'
some make-believe writers
an' would-be poets
who tell ya what we seen
for the last eight years is
the March of the Muscleheads
across the shell-shocked landscape
of the American psyche
Ain't so!
Hogwash an' propaganda!
I mean look at Nicaragua
it doesn't work
An' what do they do?
They blame us
Always us
Let's face it
if they hadn't provoked us
we wouldn't be arguin' now
Hell if they'd kept Somoza
we wouldn't have any quarrel with 'em
now would we?
Course not
No way
No how
An' what they got for tossin' out old Anastasio?
Got the Revolution that's what they got

an' damn little else
That teach 'em to mess with Uncle
you betcha
An' what we got?
Heeey — lotsa stuff
big bombs big guns big deficit
gettin' trampled in trade
during eight years of hallucinatin'
the presidency
But by golly we're still exportin' though
We're exportin' jobs, Jack —
An' they thought they had us
Hah!
An' we got us more happy homeless, too
wanderin' the width and breadth of
this great land
seein' America from the ground up
you might say
one big an' gettin' bigger happy
family eagerly explorin' economic opportunity
in the industrialized free world
Only in America.

— *Patrick Harrington*

End Note:

Our name, *Howth Castle*, is derived from James Joyce's cryptic novel, *Finnegan's Wake* and one of it's multiple meanings translates as "here comes everybody." This "here comes everybody" approach epitomizes the ideal of our publication and is reflected in our submissions' selection process, in how we produce the magazine and in what we print. Elections for the *Howth Castle* staff are held annually and are open to all students. The submissions are painstakingly read and selected through an unbiased voting procedure by the Editorial Board in which authors' and artists' identities are carefully concealed. The use of ballot boxes for votes on submissions reduces possible peer influence. What lies herein is the result of the editors' "elections" for publication; a diverse and eclectic collection.

Since it's inception in 1985, *Howth Castle* has continued to provide a forum for student arts and literature. Each and every student at UMASS, through their contribution to the SATF has made this publication possible.

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